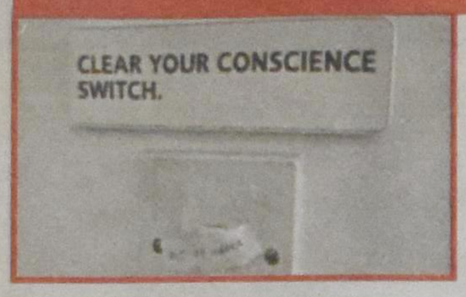

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News. Clues. Kingdom views.

CHRISTIAN COURIER

Highs and lows in High River, Alberta

Cathy Smith

Record-breaking flood waters in Southern Alberta the week of June 20 forced 100,000 people from their homes; 27 local states of emergency were declared. As the water slowly receded, it left behind a swath of ruin that has been described as looking like a "war zone." But uplifting stories are also emerging – from strangers hosting evacuees to volunteers shovelling mud from basements.

Seven Christian Reformed churches in the area were affected, two severely. On July 5, Christian Courier *interviewed Paul Droogers, pastor of High River CRC, to get an update on the aftermath there. Out of all the local CRCs, High River was hit the hardest – 65 percent of church families and the church building itself devastated by the worst flooding in Alberta's history. Some excerpts of that conversation:*

Are you at home yet?

Pastor Paul Droogers.

No. The entire basement is still being demolished. We had only five inches or so of water, but everything on the floor, of course, is done. By the time we got in there, 10 days after the fact, we had a massive mold factory happening down there. It's not a friendly environment. When you walk in the house, the smell! Not that it's much better outside. By six o'clock, the whole town of 13,000 people empties out. It's a surreal scene. Everybody's gone, but there are massive amounts of extremely dirty and raunchy-smelling stuff on the front lawns and on the curb and on the street.

How are you all doing?

We are doing remarkably well. The kids enjoy being on the farm. [*The Droogers are staying in a trailer on the farm of one of their church families.*] Although, when we were at the house yesterday, the first comment from Kees (7) and Steven (5) was "Daddy, we miss our house. We like to go back to the house." Then you enter into that conversation: "Well, it's not possible and we won't be able to for a while." You sense the weightiness.

Joel (4) has really been withdrawn through all this, and not being home has been a huge adjustment for him. As with any autistic child, routine is key to his daily learning. Not having that means we can see his development at a standstill . . . and some older, more unhealthy habits returning. So, emotionally, it's kind of up and down.

It was harder not being able to have access to the house. Everything was in limbo. Now that we have access and are working away at it, we're busy.

JILL DROOGERS

Post-flood mud: eight feet of water destroyed everything in the basement of High River CRC.

It takes a tragedy to talk to your next door neighbour.

What about your church?

The church building suffered substantial damage. We had eight

See **High River** *on page 2*

Has the Arab Spring found new life this summer?

Opponents of Egypt's Islamist President Morsi hold a large Egyptian flag during a protest in Cairo.

Mike Wevers

With the unending turmoil of world crises and catastrophic weather-driven events, Canadians, especially those in southern Alberta, ushered in summer with concern rather than hopeful anticipation of rest and relaxation. However, in the middle of world turmoil there appeared to be some spark remaining from the 2011 Arab Spring. Notwithstanding a raging civil war in Syria, and ongoing battles in Afghanistan and Iraq, there has been some progress in reducing the harshness of Islamic rule in other Middle East nations.

In Turkey, widespread protests against Prime Minister Erdogan were stopped with force; yet a court's quashing of his government's plan to redevelop an Istanbul park may embolden the protestors into more action. Through the democratic process, Iran has stepped away from its combativeness on the world stage with the election of Hassan Rouhani, a moderate cleric, to its presidency. In Egypt, the military backed the street protestors, forcing the democratically-elected President Morsi from office and his Muslim

See **Arab Spring** *on page 2*

News

High River *continued*

feet of water in the basement. Everything downstairs is totally destroyed. It was a very sorry sight when we first got in there. Our building is older, so when you are trying to do cleanup, you have to test for asbestos. One thing leads to another. It's become a much larger project than we had first envisioned. Because our panels were underwater, all the electrical needed replacing before we could even restore power to the building. The upstairs thankfully was left untouched. The insurance adjuster has said that we're looking at two and a half or three months before the church building will be remotely functional to the degree that we had before.

What was the lowest point of this ordeal for you?

Nothing prepares you for this. The challenging part is that all of a sudden I wear a lot of different hats. On the one hand, although I'm not the homeowner, I still need to be at the house directing traffic, clearing out the basement. On the other hand, we're part of the church, so you feel you need to be helping there, you need to be serving that community. Thirty-four of our 52 families were affected by this, so two-thirds of my congregation is facing the same devastation and trauma. Then, of course, there are the organizational aspects. We haven't had any services. Our church building is not accessible. So, from a leadership standpoint, it's been hard. Also aggravating is that most of the time when we're trying to call each other, our cell phones aren't working.

Have there been any inspirational or hopeful moments?

What's the phrase? It takes a tragedy to bring people together. It takes a tragedy to talk to your next door neighbour. None of the folks on my street go to my church. So now we are connecting and we have built all these new relationships. Literally right across the fence line. That's been very encouraging. We're all going through the same emotions, through the same process. Every house has all its junk at the curb. Nobody's ashamed about that. Nobody's worried about it. We all leave our homes unlocked because this has been a leveller for us.

I found out yesterday that this lady who lives three doors down from the church trains dogs for children with special needs. Before long we're having this massive conversation because we had applied for a service dog for Joel. Now I've made a connection that's going to be a tremendous help. I would probably never have met this individual. Yesterday that whole conversation just happened.

This morning Ryan flew in from Halifax with the crew that's doing demo at the parsonage right now. He was saying, "I can't believe the volunteers that have come from other areas, putting a cooler on a cart or wagon. One moment it's water going by, the next minute, it's cookies and sandwiches coming down the street."

Another God-moment: I was asked to represent the High River community at a meeting at the Samaritan's Purse headquarters. I had direct exposure to the disaster relief contacts for Samaritan's Purse, Mennonite Disaster Services and our own World Renew. That was really eye-opening. They gave a boatload of information that residents should know – although we're not hearing this information on the news. For example, about insurance. There's no overland flooding available here in Alberta, but the reality is you have to call your insurance company anyway. If there is any federal relief, they'll need to see a denied insurance claim first. People are just saying, "Whatever. We can't get flood insurance, so no need to even call the insurance company." But this collective body said, "Spread the word. You have to make that call."

These folks are on top of the legalities and logistics. For me that was a really encouraging moment. In fact, Henry Visscher from Edmonton *[World Renew]* was asked by Samaritan's Purse and Mennonite Disaster Services some very pointed questions. They were looking to World Renew for its experience, its expertise, the strength of its ministry, its resources, its mobility . . . and saying, "What can you tell us? How can you help us?" For me, as a pastor, because I announce World Renew offerings regularly, that was a highlight.

***To volunteer to help with World Renew's response, call DRS at 1-800-848-5818 or donate online at* worldrenew.net.**

The CRC Prayer Link newsletter for classis Southern Alberta has the following requests: "Pray that in the midst of the struggles people would turn to the Lord for help (Ps. 46:1); Pray that fear would be replaced by faith; and pray for wisdom for those coordinating rescue, relief and rebuilding efforts." Bill Adams, World Renew DRS Director, will coordinate volunteers from across Canada for reconstruction. "This is truly an opportunity for the CRC," he says, "to be the hands and feet of Jesus in our own communities during this unprecedented flood."

Cathy Smith is Features Editor of Christian Courier.

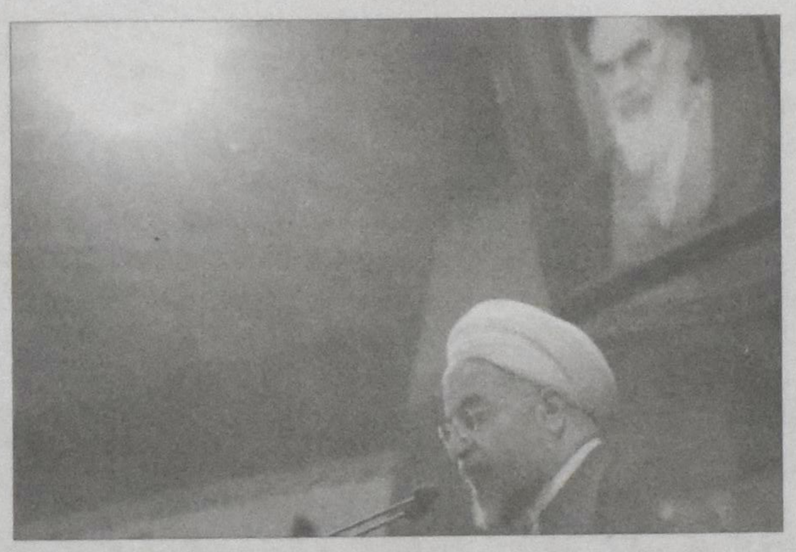
Arab Spring *continued*

Brotherhood party from government.

Turkey

Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP), led by Prime Minister Erdogan, has increasingly moved to appease its Islamic supporters in its decade-long rule, at the cost of further alienating those who prefer to at least maintain some of the secularism with which Turkey was previously identified. Its historic separation of mosque and state qualified Turkey as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This, together with its stable economic development, has enabled Turkey to negotiate its possible entry into the European Union. Joining the EU would obviously pull Turkey even more within the European influence, separating it further from its more Islamic Middle East neighbours in Asia. However, the recent unrest and uncertainty as to Turkey's ongoing development has led to the suspension of EU talks.

The catalyst for the recent unrest arises from a seemingly innocuous proposal to redevelop Gezi Park in Taksim Square in Istanbul. The government planned to remove some trees and rebuild historic Ottoman army barracks to house a cultural centre in the square. What started with some "tree huggers" trying to save the park with an occupation, broadened into an all-out confrontation with a wide range of anti-government groups protesting Prime Minister Erdogan's increasingly hard line Islamic rule. While riot police evicted the protestors from the square, the Prime Minister halted the redevelopment and agreed to respect a court decision on whether it should proceed. In early July, it was revealed that the Turkish court agreed the development should not proceed. With a taste of victory in this skirmish, Turkey's opposition movement may continue to challenge the Erdogan government on other fronts to stem what they perceive to be Islamist inroads.



Iranian President-elect Rouhani called for a more free and open society at a conference in Tehran July 3.

Iran

It may come as a surprise that there was a presidential election in Iran in June to replace the Holocaust-denying Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Barred by the Iranian constitution from seeking a third term in office, Ahmadinejad had been working hard to ensure his protégé, Esfandiar Mashaei, would secure the presidency. However, the President had a falling out with the supreme clerical ruler of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who saw Ahmadinejad's chosen successor as putting Iranian nationalism ahead of Islam. Hence the Guardian Council disqualified Mashaei, wresting all power from the now ex-President.

His elected successor, Hassan Rouhani, is a much more moderate cleric, but still understands the power and influence of Khamenei. Expectations that Rouhani may be open to better ties with the west were met in early July when the president-elect spoke to clerics in Tehran, calling for a more free and open society. Iran should be more open to freedoms, which would include internet access and respect for the press. Rouhani does not take office until August, at which time he will also have to address the ongoing issues of sanctions lodged against Iran. Although its oil based economy is still providing prosperity not enjoyed by many nations, the sanctions targeting Iran's ongoing nuclear program are taking some toll. Rouhani was at one time the lead negotiator to make Iran's case for its peaceful nuclear development (in fact his memoirs are titled *National Security and Nuclear Diplomacy)*. He will have to use those negotiating and diplomatic strengths as he meets world leaders at the highest level.

Egypt

One year into his rule, Egypt's President Morsi was forced from office in a "popular" coup d'etat. Popular because it had the support of the over 20 million Egyptians who signed petitions seeking early elections to end his rule and that of his Muslim Brotherhood party. And definitely a coup d'etat as his removal was orchestrated by the Egyptian Army, even though the army brass is trying to gild it as part of a democratic process to restore order and its quick installation of Egypt's Supreme Court justice, Adly Mansour, as interim president instead of one of their own. That it was for all intents and purposes a military coup is problematic for all nations who find military removal of democratically elected governments repugnant. All the more so for President Obama and the United States, because Obama was trying to forge a working relationship with Morsi. More importantly for Egyptians, a coup requires Obama to cut off all U.S. aid until democratic institutions are restored.

The swearing in of the new interim president was attended

See **Arab Spring** *on page 3*

Column

From the Lab

Rudy Eikelboom

The DSM-5: is bigger better?

This May the American Psychiatric Association released the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) (see June 24 *Christian Courier*). The DSM-5 is used to describe and define all mental disorders, so that doctors can classify individuals as having a particular mental disorder. This new version has generated considerable controversy in the medical and research community.

As with every new edition, the DSM-5 is bigger than the DSM-IV released in 1994. Since 1999, many people have been working on the fifth edition. As with editions one to four, this version reflects our current understanding of mental illnesses. The early versions were based on Freud's psychoanalytic view of mental illness, while recent versions are more behaviourally focused – describing the features and symptoms of the various mental illnesses but not suggesting an underlying overarching theory of the mental illness.

The hope was that for this new edition it would be possible to base the illness classifications on findings from psychology, the neurosciences and the genetics of the brain. I think it fair to say, however, that the brain has proved more complex than we hoped and neuroscience, psychology and biology are not able to help substantially (yet). So, like IV, the DSM-5 is still a descriptive manual of what features or symptoms describe a specific mental disorder.

Concerns

The symptom-based approach leads to one problem, well-known to most clinicians and researchers: the symptoms of mental illness do not fall into clearly defined groups reflective of a single illness. Some symptoms, like anxiety, are common to multiple disorders and the grouping of systems is different

When behaviour like hoarding moves from "normal" to "psychiatric disorder," is it a case of diagnostic hyperinflation?

from person to person. Medication that helps for one illness might also be useful for a very "different" disorder. Genetic advances also suggest that the classification system we use is not reflective of the underlying biological issues. People with a family history suggestive of one disorder are at higher risk for a wide variety of disorders. This suggests that while the DSM's descriptors are the best we can do, and necessary, as I described last month, they are still problematic.

The second concern is the increase in the number of behaviours that are included as mental illnesses. Hoarding is now a possible mental disorder. Some individuals, like Allan Frances, the chair of the committee that developed the DSM-IV, have expressed concern about diagnostic hyperinflation – turning what was normal behaviour into psychiatric disorders. The British Psychological Society has expressed similar concerns about this new categorization scheme. Is the exuberance and hyperactivity of a child normal, or is it reflective of an attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and would the child then benefit from medication like Ritalin? In the last 20 years the number and percentage of children diagnosed with ADHD has increased tremendously, and in the DSM-5 the suggestion is made that this disorder may need to be considered in adults.

Defining "normal"

Underlying some of these issues is a question about the nature of mental illness itself: is it an extreme form of some normal behaviour or is it a distinct and separate disorder? The answer to this question may be different for each illness. Depression may (or may not) be an extreme case of the blues that lasts longer than normal, while schizophrenia may be a distinct and separate disorder with no connection to the normal range of behaviours.

One of the principles that has driven the diagnostic process for both the DSM-IV and -5 is the notion that a mental illness is something that causes distress or personal problems for the individual. So, for example, one of the defining components of alcoholism is that the drinking causes personal problems (family, occupational or other) or harm to the individual. This has led to many behaviours being classified as mental disorders because they reflect problems with living (hoarding, for example). As Christians we can laud the attempt to help people behind this diagnostic process. Love for our neighbour is at the heart of all medicine, but perhaps in the case of mental health issues and life issues, the medical model is not the most appropriate way for us to show this love. Perhaps other forums need to be used and maybe even developed by Christians to help individuals with some of these "mental health" problems of living. But for now the DSM-5 is the best we can do.

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca), who has purchased the DSM-5, is a member of the Waterloo CRC and Chair of the Psychology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Arab Spring *continued*

by both senior Muslim and Coptic Christian clerics. The west will not explicitly welcome a coup, but will embrace a move away from further Islamist developments in the country. Egypt, still reeling from the economic chaos the original revolution engendered with its concurrent massive hit on the tourism industry, was in line for a multi-billion International Monetary Fund assistance package. Although the coup may delay the package's approval, diplomatic manoeuvering will try to make sure that IMF support would not be unduly delayed for a government more friendly to western interests. Indeed, a bailout package may be accelerated to enable a new government to deliver economic assistance to the Egyptian people, reinforcing the nascent regime's stability.

Throughout this, the millions of Muslim Brotherhood supporters, who carried Morsi to electoral victory last year, cannot be expected to sit idly by. (See page seven for how the unrest is affecting Egypt's Christian community.) The military cannot be seen to be moving to break the Brotherhood through imprisonment or persecution like the Mubarak government did. Such tactics led to Egypt's first Spring revolution. No one wants to go back there. The incredibly difficult challenge for the new government will be to get those millions onside with the new interim government. To do so, the country needs to hold elections as soon as possible. And abide with the results.

Demonstrations give way to celebrations

Istanbul residents seeking to convince Turkey's Prime Minister Erdogan to alter his government's plans, both for urban redevelopment and Islamist entrenchment, welcomed the court decision against the redevelopment. Whether they will find further joy in persuading the Ankara government to alter its moves to unite mosque and state is more uncertain. Turkey's uncertain joy was more unbridled in Iran where the majority look forward to the changes that President Rouhani is expected to bring. Finally, the initial jubilation in Egypt, with the fireworks freely launched throughout Cairo with the ouster of Morsi, challenged any Canada Day or Fourth of July show in the United States. Our fireworks herald a welcome summer. We trust that these three southern nations will enjoy a summer much like us northerners do, filled with some rest and relaxation following its tumultuous beginning.

Mike Wevers is a consultant in Edmonton, retired from the Alberta Public Service, looking forward to some family camping this summer.

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Editorials

In memoriam: two fathers and a little girl

Christina de Jong

Since May particularly I have struggled to come to terms with the incredible loss of human life all around us. The trajectory began early that month, when I traveled to the Netherlands. Tim Bosma had gone missing. As soon as I could connect to the wifi at my uncle's in Wijk bij Duurstede, I checked obsessively for news, desperately hoping to hear of his safe return to his wife and daughter, his parents, his friends. The weekend passed. Monday morning I traveled to Norway to attend the Oslo Freedom Forum. On the second day, May 14, in the middle of a plenary session called "The Climate of Fear," a colleague in Ontario messaged me the terrible news: Tim Bosma's remains had been found.

My heart, valiantly trying to process the meaning of images shown to us in presentations on "Mugabe's Reign of Terror" and "Syria's Uncovered Story," became clamped in a terrible vise grip. The same evil evidenced in images seen on a screen in Oslo was clearly reaching in and snatching away a young husband and father in my own wider church community back home. Placing Tim's murder in the context of thousands of murders, I realized anew this truth: every human life is significant, and bears great value to parents, husbands, wives, children, friends. The specific and cumulative loss of life is creating constant deep trauma; not a corner of our globe is untouched.

Senseless

From Norway I traveled to Niger, where – for five long, wonderful, hot days – I worked with our staff and a cameraman to capture some of the activities of World Renew. Deep in the bush I felt completely safe and far away from evil, buoyed by the warmth of the Bodoli and Hanlonli villagers. It wasn't until the glowing dusk of the fifth day, back in Niamey, that I caught a faint glimpse of this evil hand again.

Habibou (2nd from L) stopped to help install a bore well pump.

On our way to get a Malian refugee story, we wanted to get some footage of the wide, dusty city road. When a camel, heaped with a hill of hay, went plodding past, we asked Habibou, who was our driver, to stop so the cameraman could get out and get some shots. But there was a hubbub occurring on the road. Rich kids were drag racing and doing donuts with their cars; in the rising clouds of dust we saw the silhouettes of many Nigerians gathering to watch. Our staff person urged Habibou to drive away and park at a safe distance while worriedly looking around for our cameraman, who fortunately came loping back. He had been warned off getting any shots of the drag racers, and we laughed about one car that had become lodged on a pile of stones.

It wasn't until after I was home in Canada that our field staff person informed me that a little girl had been killed by the silly senselessness of the rich kids in their cars. With that news my heart was seized in a vise grip once again. Evil or accident? Either way, senseless and so wrong.

May bled into June with new appeals for Syria, where the death toll had reached 90,000 and the number of displaced 4.25 million. These numbers without faces, without personal experience attached, don't quite cause the same vise grip of the heart; in fact, I didn't experience the clamp again until June 24, when I heard from our field staff person in Niger that Habibou, our calm and peaceful driver, himself a young husband and a father of a little girl, had been killed in a motorcycle accident. Habibou, who used his blinker when he made a right turn in the bush, with no vehicle, person or creature in sight!

Why Tim? Why Habibou? Why a little girl?

Why, God?

Why Syria?

Is it true that not a hair can fall from our heads without the will of our Father in heaven? Is he really there, watching all this?

I want to believe. I believe, I believe. But in the face of such loss, faith wavers and crosses over into a cry: Christ, come back quickly.

Christina de Jong hails from the Scarborough Bluffs in Toronto, Ont., where she lives with her son, daughter and Golden Retriever. She is a member of the First Christian Reformed Church of Toronto and serves World Renew as Digital Communications Manager.

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That still small voice

Bert Witvoet

Teachers in the Toronto District School Board were more often sick this year than they were last year. At least, a board report showed that there was a 22 percent increase in claimed teacher sick days compared to last year. Few people believe that the increase signals a lower level of health among these teachers. This is the first year that teachers can no longer save up unused sick days for later years or cash them in for up to half a year's pay upon retirement. Did many teachers simply call in sick this year because they looked upon these sick days as an entitlement they should either use or lose?

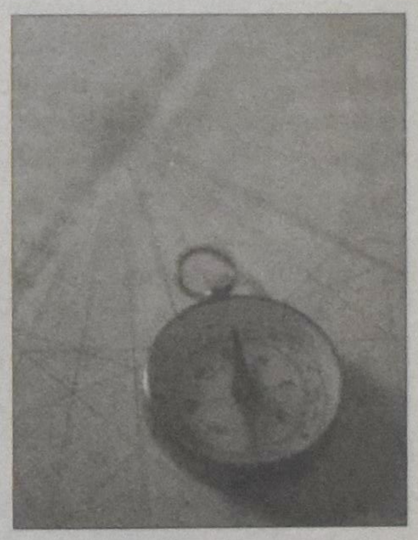
If so, one must partly fault the provincial government that permitted the banking of sick days in earlier contracts for creating this notion of entitlement. Agreeing to a contract that allows the cashing in of unused sick days is a misuse of the taxpayers' money that funds the public school system. When the Liberal government of Dalton McGuinty withdrew this benefit in a belated attempt to reign in the extravagant demands of teachers, it lacked legitimacy when it tried to stable the horse they had let out of the barn years earlier.

Just a tactic

Calling in sick when you are perfectly healthy shows a lack of integrity, of course. I clearly remember how, when I taught at Harbord Collegiate in downtown Toronto in the early '70s, a labour dispute developed between the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation and the Toronto school board. As teachers we met in the staff room to discuss our response to the unwillingness of the board to meet our demands. The leaders suggested we all call in sick one day to show our displeasure. I remember speaking against such a tactic because it was a lie and everybody knew it. "How can we stand in front of our students the next day and justify our action?" I wondered. "We demand honesty from them when they tell us they are unable to attend school or do their assignment." My words fell on deaf ears, even though the school crest prominently features "virtue and learning." No one even commented on what I had said. Somehow my input was at odds with the prevailing sense of morality.

My teacher brother ran into a similar problem a year later when the OSSTF decided to go on strike. By that time I had left the system. My brother did not think that a strike was justified and crossed the picket line to report for work. He was considered a scab. There was no room for anyone to follow the dictates of his conscience.

Come to think of it, following one's conscience is not a popular sport in our society. Think of the recent investigations into the apparent abuse of privileges by several senators. They expected to be reimbursed for expenses that were personal in nature and played with the rules about where their primary residence is. Where is that inner voice of integrity and honesty that is supposed to safeguard their position of trust? We refer to them as Honourable Members of the Senate, do we not? But it seems that the honour system is exploited for personal gain. Could this be indicative of a society that doesn't know about God and his Word?



Following your conscience is not popular sport in our society.

Built-in witness

The Apostle Paul, surprisingly, says "no." In Romans 2:14-15 he explains that Gentiles, who do not have the written law of God at their disposal, nevertheless have "the requirements of the law . . . written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness." Apparently, you don't have to be a Christian to know what's right and wrong. All you need to do is listen to your heart. And your conscience helps you to be true to what your heart says. Our conscience is not the voice of God per se. If it were, people would always know exactly what God wants them to do. But it is a God-given ability to make sense of what the world we live in requires of us. That inner knowledge has a voice and it tells us that murder, for example, is wrong. The Bible refers to it as a witness voice. But this witness voice can be quieted if we constantly disregard it and overrule it with lies.

Letters

On separation and what defines an immigrant

There is nothing aberrant about Quebec separatism (Hoekstra's "Not at home in Canada: The PQ push for sovereignty," *Christian Courier*, June 10). An independent Quebec would have the third highest per capita income in the Western Hemisphere, only slightly below Canada's, and its population would be larger than that of European countries such as Iceland, Ireland, Luxemburg, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Croatia, Slovenia and several more. If only 300,000 Icelanders and dirt-poor Haitians can be independent, then perhaps Quebeckers can be too.

Hoekstra states that Quebec independence doesn't make economic sense because English is the common language of business world-wide. This is a gross exaggeration. English is the most important language in cross-border business transactions, but most business transactions still take place within countries. MacDonald's, for instance, is a global corporation, but it sells most of its hamburgers in languages other than English. A MacDonald's restaurant in Madrid doesn't operate in English but in Spanish.

Further, Hoekstra seems to believe in the tiresome old bromide that Canada is a country of immigrants. It isn't. Are Stephen Harper and Justin Trudeau really immigrants? The status of immigrant is not hereditary. We didn't all come from somewhere else.

Hoekstra is free to call herself a Dutch-Canadian simply because her parents are Dutch, but the genealogical definition of nationality doesn't make sense. If ancestry determined nationality, the Queen would be more German than English because she has far more German than English ancestors, at least if we go back 10 generations. If someone defines himself as, say, Polish because he has Polish parents or grandparents, then the next question should be: So, what makes your parents or grandparents Polish and not Germans, Italians or Swedes? Nationality is not hereditary. It is a product of nurture, not nature.

James Schipper
London, Ont.

"Fractured flocks" discussion continues

A place to find God or feel good?

Many fractures take place under Article 17 of the Church Order of the CRC. If we seek to address the cause, we must look not to the actions of pastors or congregations; rather, we need to reach an understanding on a number of basic issues on which there presently is mass confusion.

Is the man whom we call the minister, a pastor? A leader? A ministry director? Senior pastor, or CEO of a corporation?

What is the church? A healing centre? A deliverance centre? A teacher of morality? An instructor in theology? A place that hatches, matches and dispatches? A place to find God? A place to feel good? A place that proclaims the way to heaven? The giver of the cultural mandate? Your answer is not shared by all!

The church is part of the religious enterprise. It is the prophets, priests and rulers of the church who are the architects of the Christian religion, but there are many who say that religion has outlived its usefulness and that it must change or die. Religion assumes a great divide between God and all things created, yet experience and Jesus teach us that there is no place or person where God is not. There is nothing that lives apart from God. To me, whether you agree or disagree is not the point; the fact is that there is no unanimous thought on the place of the church or of religion and that complicates immensely the relationship between those who cast the vision and those who implement it.

Once the minister was the only educated person and what he said was the Word of the Lord and the whole truth. It was the truth formulated by looking through a Christian and Reformed perspective and all the listeners were shaped by that perspective. Now, all who sit there have received an education and they represent many windows through which they have looked at the world in which we live. The preacher's area of expertise is theology – but in a time when theologies are popularized for the masses, the preacher is not the sole expert in any area and challenged in whatever she says.

We have no authoritative voice that settles these issues and answers these questions. We do not agree on the nature and extent of Biblical authority. The confessions are from a different era and do not even begin to comprehend the issues we face today. And for everyone who says that reports and synods and confessions settle issues, there are others who point out that language always requires interpretation.

We will continue to burn out pastors and congregations for no fault of their own if we do not start to address the questions I raise. The straitjackets we have put in place to limit where we may go in our discussion need to be taken away.

Dr Henry Lunshof
Guelph, Ont.

Remember your calling

We need to heed the message of Peter Schuurman's article, "Fractured Flocks" (Feb. 11, 2013), or the CRC and the entire body of Christ will be deeply hurt. The accompanying graph by David Koll is enough to shake the very foundation of the church.

I would like to address the issue of a minister's "calling." None of the articles on the subject of Pastor/Church Relations in this edition really seem to take it into account. In my own experience as a church pastor for 33 years, this sense of calling on my life to be a pastor helped get me through the tough times. We served four churches (all of which gave us great joy, as well as challenges), and in all of them we embraced God's call to minister in the particular place at that particular time. Difficulties were not always quickly resolved, but the knowledge of my calling helped me stay the course.

I do acknowledge that since my retirement 10 years ago, many things have changed for pastors and churches; however, God's call to ministry is something that needs to be taken seriously and included in the conflict resolution process that deals with pastor/church relationships.

Mike Reitsma
Calgary, Alta.

The value of a home visit

We may wonder sometimes about the value of home visitation ("Family visits: a thing of the past?" *Christian Courier,* June 10). As a pastor from past generations I treasured them, and trust they were beneficial for the sheep and lambs of my flock.

But I wanted to pass on a relevant story one of my brothers told me about one of his neighbours, a Roman Catholic, a bachelor, who one day received a visit from the priest of his village. Their church building was in need of rather extensive repairs, to the tune of well over a $100,000. The parish was small, as was their village. The visit was very cordial as they talked about the man's farm, probably about his crops and livestock, and worship services, with only a very incidental reference to the building renovations. The parishioner asked his priest how much the repairs would cost, and was given the dollar figure.

Upon leaving, the man blessed the priest with a cheque. It was for the entire amount of the cost of the proposed renovations.

The priest thanked him profusely, and added: "May I ask you what motivated this exceedingly generous deed?"

His response: "This is the first time a priest has ever been under my roof!"

I suppose Zacchaeus slept very little the night the Great Shepherd so unexpectedly stopped by for a visit at his house (as Jesus so often did), in the Father's business of seeking lost sheep and nurturing their souls. But who can place a value upon pastoral visits?

Jim Van Weelden
Grimsby, Ont.

That still small voice *continued*

The Holy Spirit says that we should live by that witness voice, even if isn't necessarily right in all details. Our conscience is a precious mechanism that we must keep intact. It protects us from losing integrity.

A Christian woman I know once said to her two teenaged daughters that, since she no longer loves her husband, she is not committing adultery when she sleeps with another man. Her daughters told her, "No, Mom, you *are* committing adultery." Their consciences were still intact. However, such is the power of the culture of deceit around us that it can silence the conscience of those who ought to know so much better.

I don't dare to suggest that our times are worse than previous times. Satan, who is the father of lies, has been around since the beginning of human life. But I have a notion that he has found the mass media and popular culture quite useful in drowning out the whispers of our consciences. And the decline of families and neighbourhood accountability does not help either.

But who knows why Senator Mike Duffy did what he did when he was discovered gorging himself at the public trough. His primary residence is in Nova Scotia, a part of the country that breathes integrity. Or is it in Ottawa? Oops. That might explain it.

Bert Witvoet and his wife Alice live in St. Catharines, Ont.

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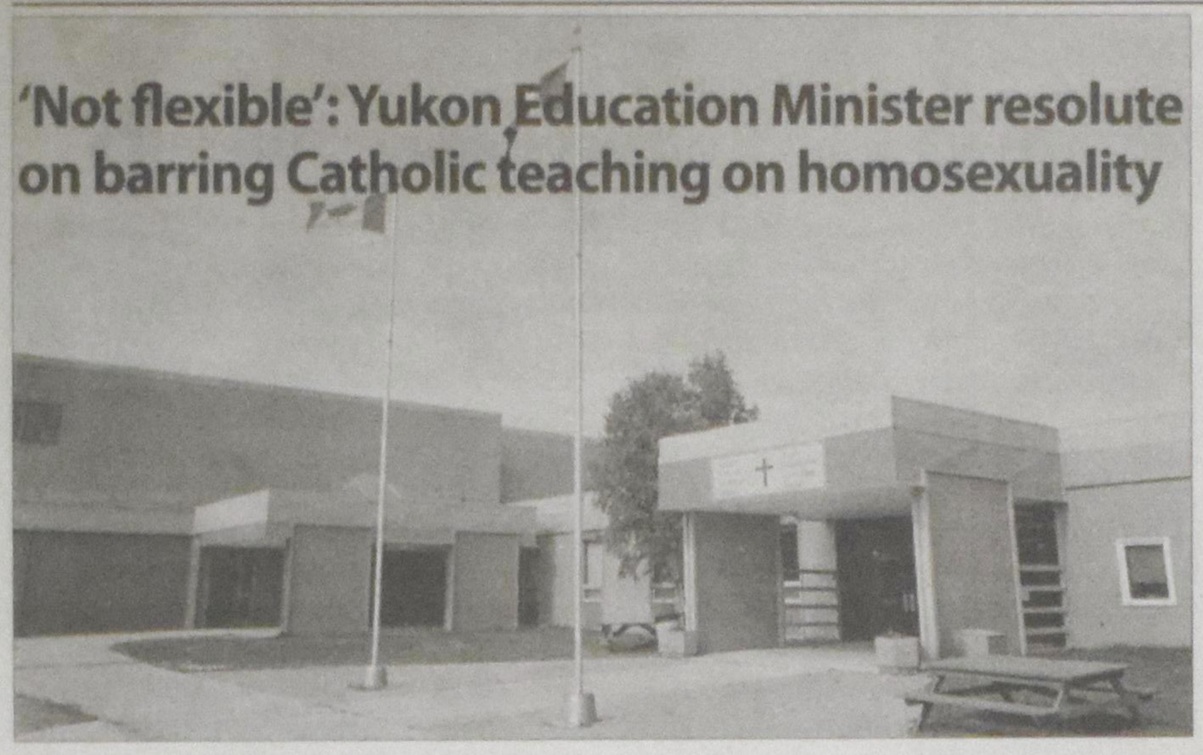
News

'Not flexible': Yukon Education Minister resolute on barring Catholic teaching on homosexuality



Does "faith taught in its fullness" go against Ministry of Education standards?

WHITEHORSE, Yukon (LSN) – While Yukon's school year has ended, negotiations on whether publicly funded Catholic schools can educate students about the Catholic Church's teachings on homosexuality remain ongoing.

Yukon Bishop Gary Gordon says he hopes there will not be a showdown between the church and the government. But the Ministry of Education has confirmed that it is "not flexible" when it comes to schools complying with the territory's newly-minted "Sexual orientation and gender identity" policy.

"We have an overarching policy to deal with gender identity and the like," said Matthew Grant, communications director for the government of Yukon. "What we're looking for, and what is being done, is each individual school can come up with their own policy that falls under the umbrella policy."

When a reporter pointed out to Bishop Gordon that the government has said it will not allow the faith taught in its fullness, the bishop replied, "Well, I don't know, we're in discussions. But you know I'm a Catholic bishop and I teach the Catholic faith."

Last March, Education Minister Scott Kent ordered Vanier Catholic Secondary School to delete from the school's website its policy on counseling students with same-sex attraction. The policy, called "Living with Hope, Ministering by Love, Teaching in Truth," quotes the Catechism of the Catholic Church where it states that "homosexual acts" are "acts of grave depravity" that "tradition has always declared" as "intrinsically disordered." While condemning homosexual acts, the policy made it clear that persons struggling with same-sex attraction must be treated with the same rights and given the same respect as everyone else.

Catholic teaching 'inconsistent' with Canadian tolerance

Bishop Gordon complied with the Minister's wishes to have the policy removed, stating at the time that the teaching would still be given to students. But this was insufficient for the ministry. It ordered the teaching to stop in a letter sent to Bishop Gordon on March 19.

In comments to *Yukon News* at that time, education minister Kent said that "religious instructional material and curriculum in the Catholic separate schools," which are inconsistent with Canadian tolerance laws and policies, "cannot have application in any publicly supported schools in the Yukon."

Education Minister Scott Kent.

The most pertinent piece of "applicable legislation" in this case is the Yukon's new 2012 Sexual orientation and gender identity policy which states that the Department of Education "values diversity in its school communities."

"The Department recognizes that students and school community members identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, intersex, queer or questioning (LGBTQ) face a unique set of challenges within schools and communities, including being targets for discriminatory behaviours," the policy states. To support LGBTQ students, the Department "will not permit or tolerate any homophobic behaviour or bullying, whether by commission or by failing to act to end such behaviour."

School communities "must develop, promote and implement respectful, pro-active strategies (for example Gay/Straight Alliances) and school based policies to ensure that LGBTQ members of school communities and their families are welcomed and included in all aspects of education and school life," it reads. "The Department supports the right of LGBTQ students to counseling that is supportive, affirming and free from efforts on the part of counselors to try to change their sexual orientation and/or identity through the use of or the referral to aversion, reparative or conversion therapies."

In the face of the imposition of a policy that runs contrary to Christian sexual morality, Bishop Gordon said he is encouraging the parents of Catholic students "to be faithful." He wants to see the negotiations end with "faith and respect for the private Catholic schools' identity."

Lukewarm Christianity leads teens to embrace atheism, foundation finds

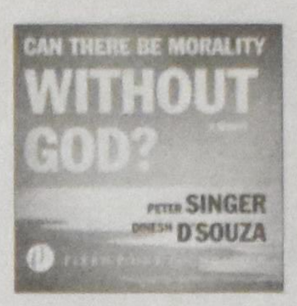
Marian Van Til, *with files from CCO, FPF*

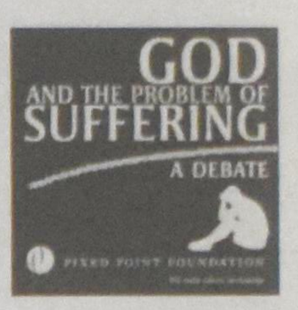
BIRMINGHAM, Alabama – "Active members of college atheist organizations tend to be students who rejected lukewarm Christianity in their high school years," according to research conducted by the Fixed Point Foundation.

"These students heard plenty of messages encouraging 'social justice,' community involvement and 'being good,' but they seldom saw the relationship between that message, Jesus Christ and the Bible," Larry Alex Taunton, the foundation's executive director, recently wrote in *The Atlantic*.

"They felt their churches offered superficial answers to life's difficult questions," he added. "They expressed their respect for those ministers who took the Bible seriously."

The Fixed Point Foundation, according to its website, seeks to "bridge the sacred and secular." Its mission is to "seek innovative ways to defend and proclaim the Gospel and to prepare Christians to do the same." The foundation particularly focuses on loving God with our *minds*. They note that Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your mind and with all of your strength." Unfortunately, "many in the church have ceased to love God with their minds," says Fixed Point. "As a consequence, a substantive public Christian response to these trends has been absent to such a degree that one major newspaper asked pointedly, 'Won't anyone stand up for God?'" Their goal is to do that, creating "a substantive public Christian response" to secular societal trends.





They sponsor debates around the world between high profile Christians and atheists/secularists on such subjects as "Is there a God?"; "Can there be morality without God?"; "Has science buried God?"; "Can atheism save Europe?" Fixed Point Foundation debates are available for download from **itunes**.

CRC's Sea to Sea cyclists stopped by heat wave – but not for long

Marian Van Til

ST. JOHN, Arizona – Riders in the Christian Reformed Church-sponsored Sea to Sea bicycle tour spent three days off-road earlier this month due to extreme heat in Arizona.

Cyclist Len Kooy.

The annual cross-continental event, which draws both Canadian and American cyclists, raises money to help various Christian agencies fight poverty. According to the Sea to Sea website, the money raised this year will be divided as follows: "Twenty-five percent goes to World Renew, 15 percent to Reformed Church in America World Missions, 25 percent to Partners Worldwide and 35 percent goes to local programs that assist the poor. These local programs are usually church sponsored and will be awarded through a grant process where they will apply to the Sea to Sea foundation."

The trip this year began in Los Angeles and will end nine weeks and 3,900 miles later in New York City. Other city stops will include Phoenix, Rehoboth, Colorado Springs, Iowa City, Grand Rapids, Ancaster (Ontario), Toronto and Montreal.

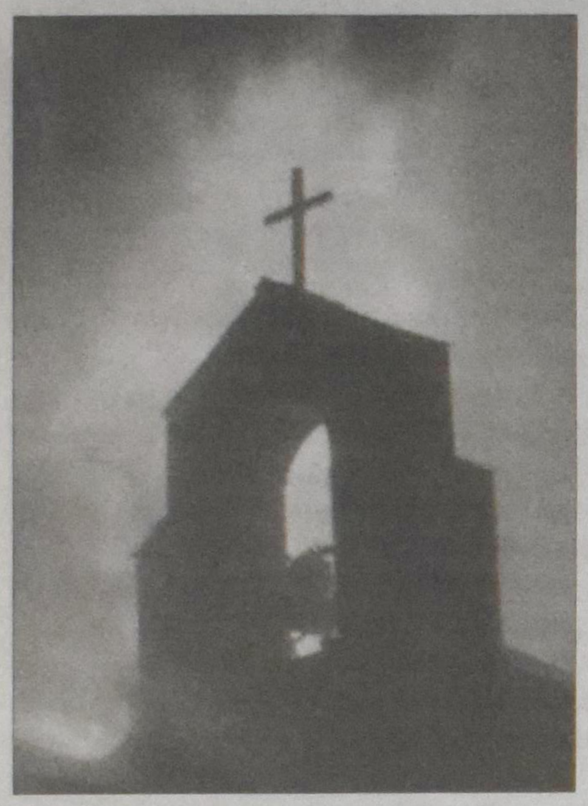
The cyclists spent a weekend and Monday in Payson, Arizona, in order to avoid riding in temperatures of 110° and above. The intense heat created serious problems for many people. And it caused a wildfire in the hills northwest of Phoenix that tragically killed 19 members of the Prescott Fire Department's Granite Mountain Hotshots. Payson, where the cyclists were staying, is 80 miles southeast of the fire site.

As the cyclists got back on their bikes and left on Tuesday morning for Heber, Ariz., some asked on their blogs for prayers for the firefighters' families, and for firefighters still working against fires in Arizona and elsewhere in the West. It was not lost on many of the young cyclists that 14 of the 19 firefighters who died were in their 20s.

At this writing (July 5) the cyclists were heading to Rehoboth, New Mexico, where they would stay for a night at Rehoboth Christian School. From there they would head northeast to Shiprock, N.M., then into Colorado, taking nine days to cross the state from southwest to northeast. Next they would cross Kansas, then enter Nebraska, arriving in Firth, Nebraska, by July 22.

News

Egypt: Coptic Christians suffered under Morsi, were threatened against joining protests



Thankfully, no one was hurt in St. George fire.

One man holds a cross and a copy of the Quran as protestors in Cairo condemn religious violence.

CAIRO (CWN) – Islamist supporters of Mohamed Morsi have burned down the Coptic Catholic parish of St. George in retaliation for the former Egyptian president's ouster. After looting the parish priest's home in Delgia, a village in Minya Governorate in north-central Egypt, the Morsi supporters set fire to some of the parish buildings.

"Thank God there were no victims and injuries, but the alarm continues," Bishop Kamal Fahim Awad (Boutros) Hanna of Minya told the Fides news agency. "The fundamentalists have closed the roads at the entrance to the village. They shout slogans against Christians. They say they want to destroy everything, and now they are trying again to storm the church. The local police are helpless. I called Cairo to ask for the intervention of the army."

The attack on the parish of St. George is so far the most serious incident of violence against Christians recorded in the dramatic hours experienced by the country. But threats and intimidation against Christian communities are also occurring in other parts of Egypt, and have occurred since Morsi first became president.

'Worry about your children'

As the protests were beginning, many Coptic Christian received letters from Muslim Brotherhood supporters. The letters warned the Copts not to join the protests, and that if they did their "businesses, cars, homes, schools and churches" might "catch fire." The messages concluded by saying "If you are not worried about any of these, then worry about your children and your homes. This message is being delivered with tact. But when the moment of truth comes, there will be no tact." It was signed by "People zealous for the nation."

Copts were even threatened on Egyptian television. During a TV interview, Sheikh Essam Abdulamek, a member of parliament's Shura Council, warned Egypt's Christians against participating in the June 30 protests. "Do not sacrifice your children," he asserted, since "general Muslim opinion will not be silent about the ousting of the president [Morsi]."

Notable in all these threats is that Christian children were specifically mentioned as targets. Threatening parents with harm or death to their children was an effective way of punishing Copts who believed they had the right to protest the Brotherhood and Morsi. Nor were these threats empty. Ever since the rise of Morsi and the Brotherhood, the targeting of Coptic children had been on the rise. Young girls were regularly abducted, raped and shamed into converting to Islam and "marrying" their rapists. Coptic boys had increasingly been abducted from the doorsteps of their churches and held for ransom. Most recently, a six-year-old Christian boy was murdered by his kidnapper – *after* the boy's family paid the ransom.

'We will show them no mercy'

A couple of months ago, while discussing the ongoing protests against Morsi, Sheikh Abdullah Badr, an Al Azhar trained scholar and professor of Islamic exegesis, made the following assertion on live TV, "I swear to Allah, the day those who went out [to protest], and at their head, the [Coptic] Christians – I say this at the top of my voice – the day they think to come near Dr. Morsi, I – we – will pop their eyes out, and the eyes of all those who support them, even America; and America will burn, and all its inhabitants. Be assured, the day Dr. Morsi is touched by any hand whichever, and connected to whomever, by Allah it will be the last day for us. We will neither leave them, nor show them any mercy."

Unfortunately, not only do some Islamic leaders insist that Egypt's Christians had no right to protest, but apparently so did the Obama administration. Days before the June 30 protests, Ambassador Anne Patterson asked the Coptic pope to urge the Copts not to join the protests, validating Sharia law's position concerning subjugated Christians: they must never complain against their Islamic overlords.

Though Morsi is now gone, his followers are even more enraged, and won't easily back down. While the long term in Egypt may be better for Christians (and global interests) the short term may well be chaotic, say observers.

Personal story

Shaman no match for Christ's power

INDIA (GFA) – Kaanan's parents had raised their son to worship their gods and goddesses. They were proud that the guru Naasih was teaching Kaanan mantras and witchcraft, offering him incredible powers of spiritual transformation.

Kaanan gradually achieved fame and influence for his skills. Villagers would call him about family problems, sicknesses, land disputes and numerous other issues. They invited him to lead their rituals.

One day, however, a man came to the village with a wholly different outlook. Gospel for Asia pastor Sabal and the people from his church were friendly enough, but when Kaanan read the booklet they gave him, "You Can Be Free," he grew angry. It repudiated of all Naashi had taught him.

A few days later when he saw Sabal preaching in another village, he was again furious. He grabbed Sabal and said, "Do you know who I am? I will bind you and recite my mantras and make you stand upside down on your head!"

The pastor replied calmly, "I belong to Almighty God. He is with me, so you can do no harm to me."

GOSPEL FOR ASIA

"If you believe in Jesus, the spirits will leave you."

Confident of his powers, Kaanan opened his mouth to say his mantras and unleash wrath on Sabal, but all he could do was stammer. Somehow, this minister's God had taken his powers.

Kaanan had a temple in his house filled with sacred images from which he sought strength. But that day when he returned home he ignored them. Instead, he reread "You Can Be Free." Now, however, he felt guilty, not angry. When he saw Pastor Sabal again he sought to make amends for the way he had treated a man he now knew was God's messenger. He told Sabal how God had so unexpectedly changed his heart, and he fell at the pastor's feet in tears. Kaanan then told his entire family that he had become a follower of Jesus, that Jesus is Lord, and that their gods do not have ears to hear. But Kaanan's wife, parents and siblings mocked him.

Satan was obviously not amused with Kaanan's transformation. Demons began attacking his family, but Kaanan was only willing to call on one power now. "I will take the name of Jesus and pray for you," he said. "If you believe in the name of the Lord Jesus, see how the spirits will leave you and go away permanently."

As Kaanan prayed, God released his family members from their torment. One by one, the demons screamed and left. With all doubts removed, his family listened to what Kaanan said about Jesus, and they believed.

Today, Kaanan is working to build a new kind of reputation. After sharing the Good News with the neighbours who formerly revered him, Kaanan joined a Bible training program to work in full-time ministry. He now gratefully tells the story of the mighty work God did in him and his family. "Jesus is the only way to salvation," he says. "All mantras are hopeless. Now we have joy and peace, at home and in our lives."

Gospel for Asia trains indigenous pastors and missionaries throughout Asia.

Columns

Flowers and Thistles
Curt Gesch

Changes

Grass and pasture surrounds my house. About 100 metres in any direction and you find trees – aspen, cottonwood, willow, lodgepole pine, spruce. There were few natural meadows in this area when settlers arrived. These meadows probably owed their existence to fires or other disasters like flooding.

On paper we fit the description of a sub-boreal forest biome. But what we've made of it is something else again. Our pastures and hayfields are in effect man-made prairies with imported grasses and legumes forming the desired species mix. When you look at the photo with the head-high (OK, my head is a little closer to the ground than many of yours) orchard grass, you are not seeing anything remotely "natural."

I mention this because so many people, upon visiting a rural area, comment on the natural beauty of pasture and forest. Right sentiment, but wrong facts. Human beings, people like you and me, have changed nature in order to have farms.

Others of us change nature to build subdivisions, office towers or freeways. First Nations settlements in our area changed riversides for their summer residences, sometimes set fires to create berry patches, or and built hunting camps.

Human beings, by their very existence, change things. Those who disparage human actions as invariably destructive have a charge of inconsistency to face, unless they wish to end their own existence. Human beings who exploit nature as if human progress were the *sine qua non* of history invite natural, if not divine, judgement.

I identify with the Deep Ecology movement, especially these principles:

- The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman Life on Earth have value in themselves, independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
- Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
- Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.

This brings us back to our un-natural prairie. When we mow a hayfield or a lawn we are performing an ecological catastrophe: destroying insects, reptiles and amphibians, mammals, birds, even fawns in some cases. On the other hand, a rotational pasture-based farm mimics "natural" prairie cycles, with herbivores (wildebeests, bison or cattle) grazing, fertilizing, creating variations in foliage height, spurring plants to grow, take up carbon and regenerate.

What I would like, of course, is the best of the prairie and the best of boreal forest. If I lived in southern Ontario, I would like the best of prairie and the best of the Carolinian forest (oak, hickory, maples, . . . ah!). If I lived on the "bald prairie" I would like forest of any kind. Human beings have an urge, it seems, to manipulate the creation to their culturally-derived ideas of what is ideal.

But we all change things. No self-righteousness allowed for farmers, park wardens or organic gardeners. What is the important thing, it seems to me, is a self-awareness of what we are doing. This involves looking around, visiting various parts of the country with a knowledgeable guide, professional or amateur, and learning to "use the earth gently."

I don't think the pastel-tinted hymns like "This Is My Father's World" and "All Things Bright and Beautiful" do the job. Although they are among my favourites, I can sing

Note to farmers: Yes, we are aware that orchard grass loses protein rapidly (about 1 percent per day) when it is headed out like this, but weather prevented us from a timely harvest.

them as if I can retreat into a "natural place," rather than looking at the place in which I dwell.

So I recommend the approach of Shirley Erena Murray, which can be found in *Lift Up Your Hearts*. Here is what Murray teaches us to sing and practice:

> Touch the earth lightly, use the earth gently,
> nourish the life of the world in our care:
> gift of great wonder,
> ours to surrender,
> trust for the children tomorrow will bear.

Perhaps forage crops are not the best use for our land. Should we consider reforestation with native species? Should we use Round-Up™ and Graze-on™ to control invading plants that we don't like (unlike the various clovers, orchard grass, timothy and alfalfa that we do)? How does our land use affect our neighbours, our small communities, our First Nations, wildlife, human health?

I'm not sure there is always one correct answer. But "Touch the earth lightly, use the earth gently" is more than a "green" sentiment. It is a gentle imperative to treat our surroundings as we are treated by the Lord and Saviour or the universe.

Curt Gesch and his wife Betsey live on a small farm (153 acres) that includes 60 acres of forage crops and a whole lot of moose pasture.

Ambassador
Thomas Wolthuis

Mall culture

Bourbon Street, Chinatown and Europa Boulevard are all here in the West Edmonton Mall. I am walking one of the High Temples of North American culture. This is how James K.A. Smith writes about the North American mall in his book *Desiring the Kingdom*.

Looking around, I see some people declare their fundamental allegiances – what they worship, in other words – on their clothing. Is it Hollister, Abercrombie, Guess or Aeropostale? Almost everyone carries packages to remind them of their religious pilgrimage.

There is an indoor waterpark for those who worship there, an amusement park with incredible roller coasters for those who crave that excitement. I noticed a simulation of creation in the undersea adventure, although it was not functional. Young children can use the indoor hockey rink to prepare themselves for ritual entry into the high priesthood of Canadian hockey.

Some worship the variety of cultures from around the world expressed through food, either on the high-end in restaurants, or the low end in the food court. I experienced Bourbon Street and had blackened bourbon chicken in the food court. The Ferguson Brothers, in their humourous book *How to be a Canadian,* reference Canadian culture as a mall culture, with the food court as the primary food heritage of Canada.

Consumer culture

The stores all look alike. How many shoe stores does a mall need? This mall has 35, plus sports stores. How many clothes do we really need to squeeze into our closets? Does anyone need Restoration Hardware or the Pottery Barn? What? No Restoration Hardware or Pier 1 Imports? I count 33 cellular services, 34 financial services and ATMs, 62 health and beauty stores, 49 places for jewelry and accessories and at least 68 clothes stores, not to

Worship at the West Edmonton Mall, a High Temple of North American culture.

mention the 12 shops for lingerie only and 8 bridal boutiques. Is the combination of shopping, entertainment and adventure simply a way to gather all the things we worship under one roof? Stuff, food, entertainment, sports, appearance . . . the sum total of North American culture.

I am perhaps too harsh and judgmental. Maybe the mall is a place of community. Maybe it is the place where cultures enjoy each other's differences, learn from each other, share with each other.

I did not fully participate in the worship in the mall. I ate because it was dinner time. I did not buy anything – maybe because I worship money. I did want to ride roller coasters. If I had more time and were more prepared I would have enjoyed the waterpark, as I did 25 years ago when I brought 450 young people here from Grand Rapids, Michigan for the Young Calvinist convention in Edmonton. What did this excursion to the mall tell them when they were attending a religious gathering for young people?

Churches and malls

When people go to church, it is often in isolated cultural ways. Malls seem to bring people together. Church seems to split people into separate ethnic groups. Malls are culture. Churches are sometimes a culture of the past. The mall has something for all ages, all cultures, if you have the money. The church is free, a place of grace, but declining in numbers in North America. Is the church too separated from culture?

Christ and culture

The church's relationship with culture is a difficult question. In 1951 H. Richard Niebuhr laid out approaches to culture from various Christian traditions in his book *Christ and Culture*. He delineated the positions of Christ Against Culture (often the approach of Fundamentalism and Anabaptists), Christ of Culture (often associated with "liberal" Protestantism), Christ Above Culture (associated with Roman Catholicism), Christ and Culture in Paradox (in Lutheranism and being revived in Reformed "two kingdoms" discussions), and clearly Niebuhr's position of Christ the Transformer of Culture (the traditional Reformed view). Although Niebuhr's analysis and categories have been challenged, it is still a helpful heuristic. More recently, Andy Crouch has advocated for Christians to be *Culture Making*.

Should we be separate and make our own culture, or engaged in shaping our culture's culture? What does that look like? What does it mean for a businesswoman, a stock trader, a salesperson, a consumer? These are the questions with which our Christian institutions, especially churches and schools, need to wrestle.

What are the needs that both the mall and the church are addressing? Are we only consuming culture? Is the alternative now to retreat into sub-communities or just live in both worlds? How do we build bridges between God's new world in Christ and the mall?

Rev. Tom Wolthuis (TWolthuis@icscanada.edu) shares the position of President of the Institue for Christian Studies in Toronto, Ont. with his wife Dawn.

Reviews

Some songs for a sweltering summer

Brian Bork

There's already been a quite a number of sweltering days this summer, but so far I've made do without air conditioning. Humid weather brings that "close" feeling; the sense there's not enough room cool off, to breathe, to think with the usual sort of clarity and focus. Yet I've found that the world seems to open up a bit when you turn on the stereo, turn off the lights, and sit under the ceiling fan. Music stirs my imagination unlike any other form of art, and it doesn't take long to transport me away from the perspiration damp and cicada drone of a July afternoon.

I'm taking space this issue to point out some albums I feel have suited these hazy days quite well. They've all been released recently (the last year or so), and they're all deeply rooted in the folkier side of what I like to call "American vernacular music." Strummed guitars, deftly-picked banjos, tremulous pedal steel, and country harmonies – that sort of thing. Music rooted in the sunny South and the dusty West, music perfectly crafted for long summer days.

Please take the recommendations more as an endorsement of the artist than the specific album. The albums are marvelous of course, but each artist has a lively back catalogue that is most definitely calling for your earnest and attentive exploration.

Jason Isbell – *Southeastern*
Southeastern Records, 2013

I love a good redemption story, and Isbell's life over the past few years has all the components to make it a classic in the annals of country music. Newly sober, newly married and with a renewed focus, he's made *Southeastern* his finest work since his days with the Drive-By Truckers (the reigning grand champions of Southern rock). As with any tale of overcoming addiction, Isbell takes his listeners to some pretty dark caverns on this record, but there are abundant shafts of light, too. He highlights the joys of recovery and the transforming power of genuine human connection, singing in the album's opener: "In days when we raged, we flew off the page, such damage was done / but I made it through, 'cause somebody knew, I was meant for someone." This is cracking good country rock, inflected heavily by the propulsive, muscular soul music of his native North Alabama.

The Tallest Man on Earth – *There's No Leaving Now*
Dead Oceans, 2012

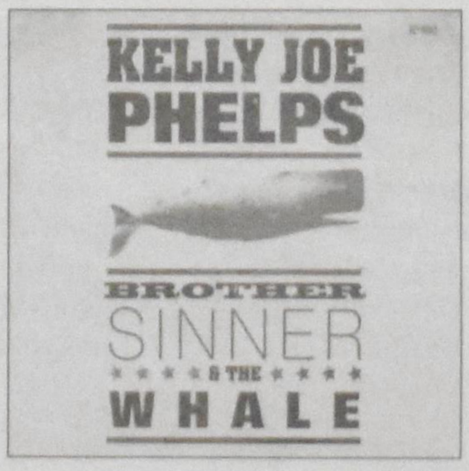
I can't verify his stature, but Kristian Mattson is surely a master of the American troubadour tradition, sounding as if he was birthed out of some Piedmont soil, down deep in what Greil Marcus calls "the weird old America." He's actually from Sweden, but you'd never know it, given the way he croaks like Bob Dylan's great-great-granddaddy. His ragged voice is half the appeal (though I understand some may consider it a stumbling block), but he also has a keen sense for composing a yearning melody that shifts, shuffles and soars at precisely the right moment. Mattson is a consummate introvert, and his earlier records explore the joys and perils of spending time alone and in isolation. This new record shows he might be yearning for a bit more connection, as he sings of the desire to trust and follow another: "You have all what's mine, and you're leading me now." Still, this is a fine record for playing through headphones on those days when you just need to tune out the world for a bit.

Steve Martin and Edie Brickell – *Love Has Come for You*
Rounder, 2013

Steve Martin (yes, that Steve Martin) plays a mean and lovely banjo. Bone dry and sounding as ancient as a Louisiana live oak, he provides an intricate and steady platform for Brickell's spare and heartfelt vocals. There's something undeniably homespun about this album, but it never dives into cloying caricature. Brickell's lyrics are the expected bluegrass fare of love earned, lost, and complicated, but updated for the 21st century. "When You Get to Asheville" will make you yearn for all those friends who've left you behind as they've moved on to (supposedly) bigger and better towns, and "Siamese Cat" is a delightful and hilarious exploration of the way love is complicated by your sweetheart's annoying family members.

Patty Griffin – *American Kid*
New West, 2013

Patty Griffin is a magnificent singer, with one of those razor sharp voices. I don't know if it's her flawless sense of pitch or the way she has no use for distracting, melismatic showboating, but put a record of hers on, and you'll be surprised how quickly she cuts into you, excavating some feelings you thought you'd buried pretty deep. Heartache and loss have always been a focal point for Griffin, and *American Kid* is no different. It's a strikingly elegaic album, one that mourns the departed, be they friendships or faith in God. Things don't stay lost for good, though, and Griffin hints that something glorious may live beyond the veil of heartache as she sings to a lost loved one: "You can get up on some sunny day and run / Run a hundred miles just for fun now / Heartaches and yesterdays don't weigh a ton now / You can get up on some sunny day and run." "Highway Song," a duet with Robert Plant, is haunting and forlorn, yet pledges the sort of fidelity recognizable to Christians: "I will wait for your return, I will wait for your return."



Kelly Joe Phelps –
Brother Sinner & the Whale
Black Hen Music, 2012

Kelly Joe Phelps' records have always been preoccupied with sin and salvation, and have shifted from faith to doubt and back again. He reportedly spent some time soul-searching since his last album, and if this recent one is any indication, he's emerged with a renewed faith. The album is a blend of traditional gospel blues songs and Phelps' originals, though he's so rooted in the tradition that it's hard to differentiate the two sometimes. Salvation is the broad theme here, and on nearly every song Phelps gives gratitude to God for placing him back on the righteous path. His well-worn voice is perfectly suited for the material here, pulling off that bluesman's trick of sounding simultaneously world-weary and earnest. He is a staggeringly gifted guitar player too, as "Spit Me Outta the Whale" attests. There aren't too many musicians who can refresh well-trod old songs like Phelps can; keep your ears open for a lovely rendition of "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehova" near the close of the album.

Features

Christian Courier is delighted to announce the winners of the **Fourth Annual Children's Short Story Contest**. The finalists were judged by Angela Reitsma Bick, editor, Brian Bork, review editor and Cathy Smith, features editor. We congratulate Renessa Visser, 12, our Intermediate Category winner, and Ebony Omodara, 10, our Junior Category winner, both of whom will receive a $50 gift certificate from Toys R' Us. Renessa's story crackles with crisp vocabulary and contains all the elements of a short story: engaging and strongly-drawn characters, believable dialogue, satisfying coherence in the plot structure and a protagonist who gains in maturity. For such a young writer, Ebony's story shows considerable awareness of contemporary spiritual issues and her writing voice is self-confident and authentic. Two entries were awarded an Honourable Mention and are also featured in this issue. We received many creative entries and we want to encourage all our young writers to keep on developing their skills! *Cathy Smith, Features Editor.*

WINNER - INTERMEDIATE CATEGORY

The Cat of Courage

Renessa Visser

Sierra was a farm cat named after the mountains that stood behind the farm where she lived. She had beautiful rust-on-orange-coloured fur, and her eyes were a quiet green.

Sierra was an unusual kitten. Unlike her brothers and sisters, she was born disabled, with one leg stiff which was very sore if she used it. She learned to walk, but she was very slow and it took much effort. When the farmer found out about her disability, he took her to the farmhouse where she ate and slept.

When she was outside, Sierra often sat by herself and watched the birds. Birds, in Sierra's opinion, were very interesting. If she could hunt, she probably would've gulped a few birds down by now . . . but Sierra was different. Gradually a rather bold Downy Woodpecker, called Birdsong, noticed Sierra wasn't posed motionless on sunny afternoons to hunt birds, but only to watch them, and they got to know each other. Unlike her fellow cats who rejected her, Birdsong accepted Sierra for who she was.

Mr. Tapper makes a request.

"Too bad you don't have wings," remarked Birdsong thoughtfully once.

"I know," mourned Sierra, "but I must be a cat."

"You act like no cat I've ever met!" tittered Birdsong, "Most cats would have me for supper!"

Sierra was annoyed and snapped, "Oh be quiet, Birdsong! I couldn't eat you if I tried!"

Birdsong gave a jaunty flip of her wings, "It's surprising enough how you managed to survive before the farmer found you, my friend, and please don't take offense to my saying so."

Sierra huffed, but there was no use getting angry. What Birdsong said was true. It was miraculous how the farmer had found her, for cats' nests are meant to be hidden.

So Sierra learned to manage in her own way, depending on the farmer's wife for care. By the time spring came, Birdsong had a companion named Mr. Tapper, and together they were very busy making a nest. Sierra would watch them for hours, until Birdsong shooed her away because Mr. Tapper was getting nervous. (Mr. Tapper still didn't enjoy the company of a cat, even if it couldn't eat him.) So Sierra would limp away.

One warm spring day in mid-May Mr. Tapper met Sierra by the forest looking rather anxious.

"Ah, Sierra . . ." he began hesitantly.

Sierra turned and looked him full in the face. "What is it?" she asked. "Where is Birdsong?"

"Birdsong is sitting on the eggs," said Mr. Tapper proudly, "I came to tell you though . . . just yesterday a cardinal fledgling was trying out his wings, and a cat got him as he fell . . ." Mr. Tapper looked very mournful.

Sierra felt as though she had been punched in the stomach. "Who?" she cried angrily. "What cat?"

Mr. Tapper shuddered. "I have no idea, but you can understand Birdsong and I are worried about what will happen when our eggs hatch."

"Indeed!" declared Sierra. "But if you want me to guard your nest, I can be of no help."

"We don't need you for that," said Mr. Tapper quietly, and he hastily added, "We wondered if you would talk to the barn cats."

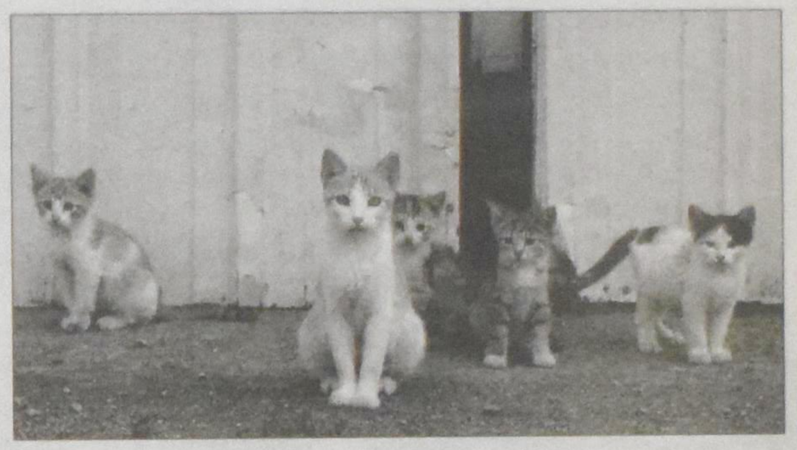
"I can't!" cried Sierra. "*They* don't respect me!"

Mr. Tapper stared at her with his beady eyes. "When have we asked you to do too much, Sierra?" he demanded. "You are a cat, and you can be brave . . . but only if you want to be."

Sierra felt frantic. "But Mr. Tapper," she pleaded. "I'm disabled! How could I do such a thing?"

Mr. Tapper bowed. "It is your choice, Sierra," he said, "and before I go, tell me, what would you do if a fox was raiding your kittens?" And then, with a flip of his wings, Mr. Tapper was gone.

Sierra sat for a long time by the forest. Her thoughts were a tumult of worry and indecision. She glanced up at the sky; the sun had begun to set. She shivered. Would the barn cats listen? It would be so nice to sleep tonight, and forget about what had happened. But she knew she never could face Mr. Tapper and Birdsong again. Gathering up her courage, she limped towards the barn.



The barn cats gather.

When Sierra entered, a brown female cat jumped towards her. "What do you want?" she hissed.

For a second, Sierra shrunk back. But then she raised her head and said, "I want all the cats to come and listen to an important message I must say."

The other cat sniffed. "The house cat has an *important message!* Well, won't that be interesting!"

Hoarse laughter echoed in the barn loft, and slowly all the barn cats came and sat around Sierra, whose heart was pounding wildly. "Just today," she began, "my friend told me that fledglings were being snatched up – by cats. . . ."

"So?" jeered someone. "They're easy prey!"

"And tasty, too!" someone else snickered.

"So I propose a plan!" declared Sierra, trying to sound confident. "I propose not to hunt birds in the nesting season. Any other time you may eat them, but simply not in the spring!"

"Why?" came a snort.

Desperately, Sierra tried to regain her audience. "What if a fox came, and raided the barn every spring? Would that not be a disaster for you and your young?"

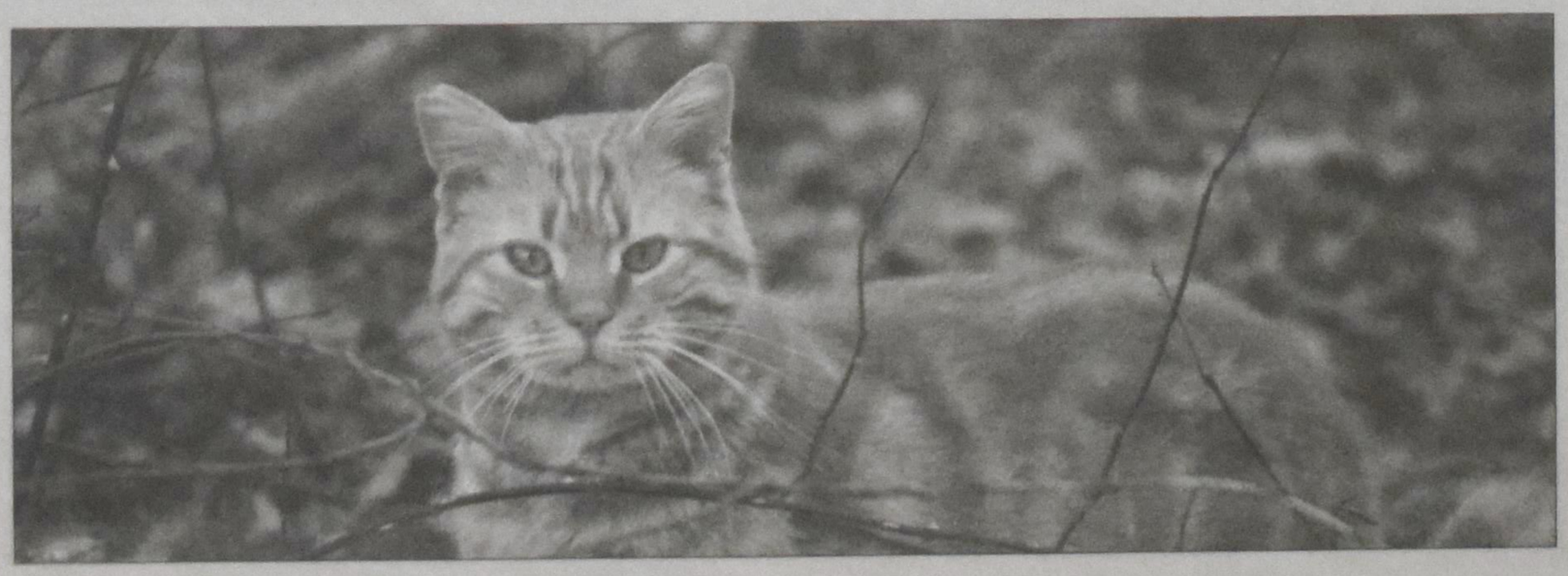
A murmur spread through the crowd. "That's different," someone protested.

Sierra spun around, as quickly as she could. "How?" she demanded. "In what way, exactly?"

There was a long silence. Then the brown cat said, "Very well. I know the pain when an offspring dies. Let's do as Sierra asks."

Sierra bowed her head respectfully. "Thank you, my friend." And outside, the barn swallows flew in a shining arc, shimmering in the setting sun.

Sierra makes a choice.



Renessa Visser is a 12 year old homeschooled student who lives in Burlington, Ontario. She loves writing stories and taking pictures of people and animals.

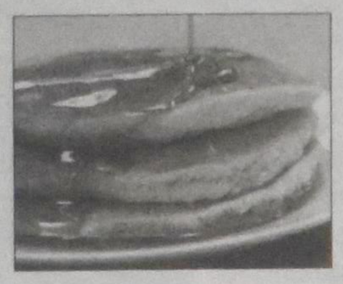
Features

WINNER - JUNIOR CATEGORY

Lost and Found

Ebony Omodara

Do you ever wonder how your dreams are picked? Well last night I did. I had a dream that I worshipped God and was a "goodie two shoes." I woke up and convinced myself that would never happen to me. The phrase "God's creation" is just another way of saying the "Big Bang." Besides, anyone with common sense knows that there is no such thing as God. He's just a made-up person that people say is the creator. And Satan! Oh, please.



Dad only made pancakes when he was in his happiest mood.

I got rid of the memory of that dream, and raced downstairs for breakfast. "Morning, Mabel," said my mother in her jolly tone. I wonder what has gotten her in such a good mood? I could smell fresh pancakes as I entered the room. What was going on? Dad only made pancakes when he was in his happiest mood. Questions filled my mind. Are we moving? Was I getting a brother or sister? I asked, "What's going on?"

For a moment, my mom and dad just stared at me and then said, "We're going back to church!" She smiled like going to church was like winning tickets to a Justin Bieber concert. I was so confused and mad. Why would they decide that? "What!" I shouted. "I don't even believe in God!" My mom was speechless for a second and said in a casual tone, "Honey, we grew up in a Christian community, and we want you to follow God just like we do."

There was an uncomfortable silence in the room as we ate breakfast. I just couldn't believe their decision. Wouldn't they rather do something fun, than worship something that's just made up? I don't want to be in a place filled with boring people. As if Mom read my mind, she looked up, and said, "I know you don't want to worship God with the adults, so I signed you up for a youth group for teens, 14-16." I felt a little better about going to church than I did before, but I still preferred not going.

Today was the day, the day that Christians call the Sabbath, but I just called Sunday. Since you're supposed to wear nice clothes to church, I wore my cream-coloured dress and my white flats. My mom complimented me for being willing to get all dressed up. But I knew her well enough to know it meant: *Finally you wore something pretty. You're always wearing those track pants and ugly T-shirts.*

What a waste of money, I thought. I think it's stupid to waste money on such a big building just to worship this God. I walked from hall to hall trying to find the youth group. Finally I found it. This seems just like school. I wonder if I'll fit in. Wait, this is church, people here are supposed to be kind and loving.

I searched the room to find someone my age to talk to. Finally I found a girl who was wearing more black makeup than a spy. Didn't Christians need to dress simply and, well, in white? "Hi, I'm Mabel, um . . . I'm new here." She stared at me for a while and then said with a smile on her face, "Hi. I'm Savannah. You can call me Savvy.

We talked for some more and then I decided to ask, "Don't mean to be rude but, um . . . don't Christians have to dress . . . classy or something?" She stared at me with a frown. Uh oh, I thought, my first friend here and I made her mad. After a long awkward silence, she replied, "Look, I can tell that you're not a Christian, but I think you should show some more respect to other people's religions. To answer your question, no. We just can't dress disrespectfully. And more importantly, we have to act respectful, too."

Luckily, the chapel was about to start. She was right. Maybe I should respect other people's religions.

The pastor walked onto the small stage and began to preach: "Let's start with a song of praise to worship God." We started to sing "10,000 Reasons." When I say "we," I mean everyone but me. But, I'm starting to doubt that God's not real. I mean if God wasn't real, then why would so many people waste their Sundays going to church?"

The line "You're slow to anger" caught my attention. Maybe that's why when I do something wrong, I don't always get *spiritually* punished. I didn't know what to believe now. Before I knew it, we sat all sat down and the preacher started to preach. I hope I didn't fall asleep because I couldn't hear or remember him saying a word. But finally I caught up to what he was saying: "Sometimes we all wonder is God real. But you can't say he is or he isn't. But if he isn't, then how would we be here today? Even if there is such a thing as the Big Bang, who would have made the Big Bang?" I was so confused. Is God real is he not?! Why can't someone just answer me? Well, I guess it doesn't even matter . . . who am I kidding? I've made my decision.

"Mom, Dad, thank you for bringing me here. At first I was being a little bit selfish and disrespectful. I'm sorry . . ." They looked at each other and then at me. They had the happiest expressions on their faces that I've ever seen. Dad said, "I was not very happy that you were lost, at first, but now I am happy that you are now found."

With that we all hugged. I like that phrase – lost and found.

"Mom, Dad, thank you for bringing me here."

Ebony Omodara, 10, is in Grade 5. She loves art, writing, fashion and expressing her creativity to the world.

HONOURABLE MENTION

The Disastrous Day

Samantha Korvemaker

It was a sunny day in late June on a small farm far out in the country. Alyssa was a 10 year old girl who loved her farm.

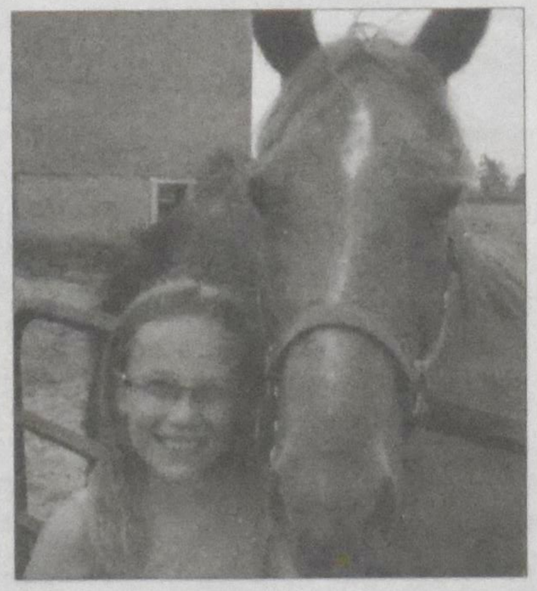
Alyssa was told by her mother to go play outside. While Alyssa was outside, she decided to go ride her horse, SunStreak. She tacked up her beautiful deep chestnut-coloured quarter horse. She rode her horse over to their forest a while away and when they got there she sighed a deep sigh and took in all the beautiful scenery.

She leaned over to pick a beautiful daisy for her mother, but she didn't see the wasp on the underside of the flower. When she picked it, she jerked back her hand and yelled in pain as she looked at her throbbing hand. The sudden noise and movement on SunStreak's back caused her to rear and take off around the bend.

Alyssa got up holding her hand and rubbing her side gingerly. It took her a while to get to the bend in the path due to her pain. When she turned the bend, what she saw made her heart nearly stop. Alyssa expected SunStreak just to be nibbling on some grass, but no, SunStreak was lying in the grass, not moving!

Alyssa ran over to SunStreak in tears. She wondered what had happened because there were no cuts or scratches on her. Then she saw a big log nearby and on it was a long mark. The thought ran through her mind that SunStreak must have tripped on the log in her "mad dash" and hurt her leg. Alyssa felt SunStreak's flank. It was warm.

She had no idea what to do when she heard a rustling noise in the bushes. Thoughts rushed through Alyssa's mind, Was it a bear? Was it something that was going to hurt them?



Samantha Korvemaker and her horse, Ginny.

Before she had time to think of anything else, a local hunter, a friend of her father, came out of the bushes. Alyssa heaved a great sigh of relief. The hunter's name was Raynold. Raynold asked Alyssa, "What happened to your horse?" Alyssa told him everything that had happened. After Raynold heard the story, he knelt down next to Alyssa and put his arm around her. He said, "Well, why don't we call your father?"

Alyssa's father came with his truck and trailer and they loaded SunStreak up very carefully and brought her to a horse doctor down the road. The doctor's name was Alice. Alice took SunStreak in and told Alyssa and her father they could wait for SunStreak in the waiting room.

After about ten minutes Alice came out with good news. "You'll be happy to know that SunStreak is alright. But, to be on the safe side, you'll have to give her this medicine." Alice handed Alyssa some pills with a special plunger to help get them down SunStreak's throat. "Oh thank you so much!" Alyssa gave Alice a great big hug.

When they arrived at home with SunStreak, Alyssa's mother was waiting at the door with a plate full of cookies. She had a worried expression on her face, but when she saw everyone there safely her worried expression began to fade.

Alyssa brought SunStreak to the barn and made sure she was super-comfortable. "I love you," she said. She gave her one last hug before going to have cookies with her mother and father.

Samantha Korvemaker is 10 years old. She's a student at John Knox Christian School in Wyoming, Ont. She loves riding horses.

Features

'A faith centered on the Word – and words'

"If parents . . . read aloud a minimum of three stories a day to [their] children, we could probably wipe out illiteracy within one generation." – Mem Fox

Linda Jonasson

Most parents know how important it is to read to their children as they are growing up. Unfortunately, they don't always do it. Some parents just can't be bothered; others feel overwhelmed by the demands of their jobs. For some, reading has become "passé." Technological gadgets have taken the place of good old-fashioned books.

Reading is educating

Reading Magic, by Australian author Mem Fox, is the most powerful book I have ever read about reading aloud. When Fox sent her daughter Chloe to kindergarten, she did not expect her to be reading within two weeks. She wanted to know how the teacher had turned her daughter into a reader overnight. "Did you read aloud to Chloe regularly?" asked the teacher. Fox had indeed read to her daughter every night since she was born, setting the foundation for her reading future. This life-changing realization led Fox to get her Masters in Education and become a literacy expert. Today, she is the author of 30 books including *Sleepy Bears* and *Wherever You Are*.

Many people think that a child's education begins at school, but Fox seeks to impress on parents that a child's education begins long before that first day of Kindergarten. She explains that if parents read three books to their child every night, they will be exposed to at least 1,000 books by Kindergarten. And there is a good chance they will become early readers.

Reading aloud regularly made my son Thomas an early reader. By the age of three, he was reading my grocery lists. On the first day of Junior Kindergarten, at three and a half, he read an entire book to the teacher. By age four, he read *Dr. Seuss' ABC* to his cousin.

Reading creates attachment

Reading aloud to your child is not only a learning opportunity, but also a bonding experience. When a child snuggles up in a parent's lap, it's a wonderful moment. Reading a book can be a jumping-off point for other bonding experiences. Years ago, my son's uncle bought him a book called *The Night Santa Ate Too Many Cookies*. A recipe for Christmas cookies was tucked inside the cover. We baked the cookies and the experience became an annual tradition. I know a teacher who read the *Anne of Green Gables* series to her daughter. A couple of years ago, they rented a cottage on P.E.I. and made a family vacation out of the reading experience. My husband's father used to read him an old German anthology of stories about children who get into mishaps called *Der Struwwelpeter*. Rob, his sister Ingrid, and their dad would often act out the scenes from the book, getting hours of enjoyment from their skits.

Reading opens up the world

Reading is not only a way to enjoy stories, but also artwork. Today's books are full of beautiful pictures. Illustrator and author Barbara Reid offers wonderful plasticine images in her books *Picture a Tree* and *Two by Two*. Reading is also a way to learn about history. *One Splendid Tree*, for example, is a story about two children whose mother works in a factory and whose father fights on the World War II battlefield. With very little money, they use a plant as a Christmas tree topped by an angel sent by their father.

CATHY SMITH

Student artwork inspired by Barbara Reid.

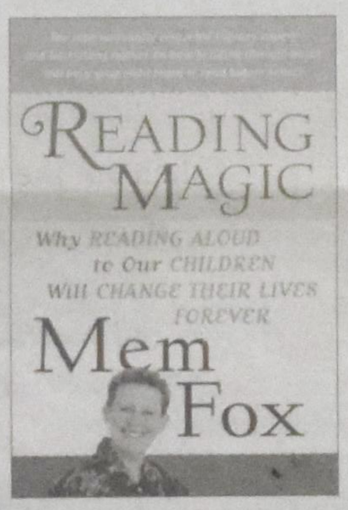
Reading is a life skill

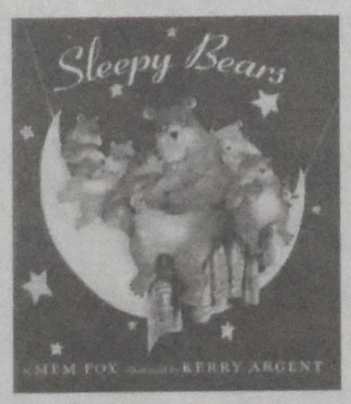
According to Jim Trelease, author of *The Read Aloud Handbook*, an American family's socioeconomic status directly corresponds with their literacy level. For instance, while children of professional parents were exposed to an average of 26 million words by age 4, those from working class families were exposed to 15 million words, and those from poverty-level families were only exposed to 13 million words.

The Canadian story is not much different. In 2005 hockey coach Jacques Demers announced he was illiterate. Sadly, he was not alone. Statistics Canada reports that 42 percent of Canadians were semi-literate in 2006 (**cbc.ca**). The current semi-literacy rate is 40 percent (**abclifeliteracy.ca**). Being literate is critical for functioning in society. Without basic reading skills, how can we:

-read an aspirin bottle
-read signs in the grocery store
-fill out a job application
-pass a driving test
-read bus/train schedules
-complete our income tax
-help our children with their homework?

Statistics Canada reports that every one percent increase in the nation's literacy rate translates into a 2.5 percent increase in our gross domestic product (nationalreadingcampaign.ca).





Reading is empowering

While socioeconomic status can hold a child back, this was not the case with African-American author Richard Wright, whose childhood struggles are related in the picture book *The Freedom of a Library Card*. Raised in Mississippi and Memphis, his father left the family when Richard was only five years old. Richard hungered for books to read, but blacks were forbidden to possess a library card in the Deep South in the 1920s. Determined that her son would read, Mrs. Wright would rummage through garbage cans for newspapers so that Richard could read the comics. As a teenager, Richard was employed by a white man who would send him to the library to borrow books for him. Richard asked if he could sign books out for himself using his boss's library card and the latter agreed. The young teen devoured books like *Oliver Twist* and *War and Peace*. An avid reader made an avid writer. Richard went on to pen 16 books, including *Native Son*, a book about the struggles of blacks growing up in the Deep South. Jim Crow laws had oppressed black people for years, but Richard Wight learned that by reading, he acquired knowledge, and that with knowledge came power.

Reading informs faith

Why should Christians want to raise readers? First of all, it's part of our history. Karen Swallow Prior writes, "From the carving of God's commandments on stone tablets to the narratives and letters circulated within the early church, from the painstaking preservation of the scriptures at the hands of medieval scribes to the Protestant Reformation's birthing of the printing press and the invention of the modern university, ours has been a faith centered on the Word – and words" *(Christianity Today)*.

Being a good reader goes beyond pronouncing the words correctly and understanding the text. It means being able to read *critically*, being able to form our own opinions about what we have read. In a day and age when we are bombarded with messages from a largely secular press, we, as Christians, need to be able to decipher the truth.

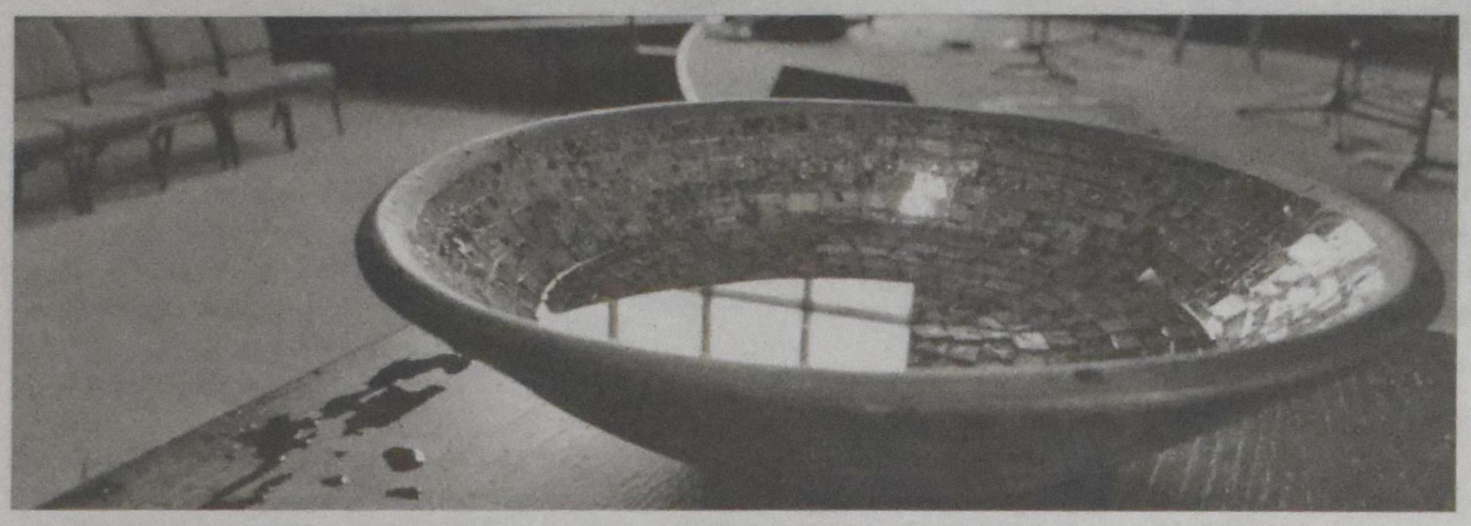
What we read can influence our world view. As Christians we should also be reading books that inculcate our Christian values. We want to expose our children to a plethora of books; but at the same time we want them to learn and grow as Christians. So, as Christians, we do have to be selective. And this becomes even more relevant as our children age. I remember attending a writer's conference where a graphic novel, which had won a literary award, was passed around. It was full of swearing! It was not something I would want my teenage son to read.

Obviously, as Christians, we should be reading the Bible. The Bible is timeless. In God's Book, we find everything. By reading the Bible, we learn how God wants us to live our lives. We learn that we are not alone. We are only a tiny part of an infinite universe. We learn that Jesus is our Saviour. And when we are filled with this knowledge, we want to pass the Gospel on to others. As it says in the Bible, we will not spread Christianity by the sword, but by the word. A Christian world must be a literate world. Robert Bruinsma explains: *"Knowledge in Scriptures is not finally something one possesses but something one uses to serve God, neighbour and creation. This is the essence of discipleship: using knowledge to serve others."*

Whether it is Mem Fox reading Dr. Seuss to her preschool daughter in Australia or Ella Wright reading comics to her young son in Tennessee, reading aloud is a magical experience. So, parents, use your knowledge to serve your children. Read to your children. Read with love. Read with hope. Read with conviction. Read not only to pass on knowledge, but to pass on the truth. To pass on discipleship. And . . . let them see you reading. Readers raise readers.

Linda Jonasson is an elementary school teacher and writer. She lives with her family in Brantford, Ont. and attends Hope CRC. She blogs at ***alinefromlinda.blogspot.com****.*

Columns



From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til

'To us and our children the promise is made'

Do you often – or *ever* – think about your baptism? It recently occurred to me that I rarely consider my baptism, despite the profound implications of that sacrament.

This is what got me thinking about it: the Lutheran congregation where I'm the music director acknowledges in their weekly bulletin church members' baptismal anniversaries. Candles near the baptismal font burn throughout the service, one candle for each person having such an anniversary. Though Lutherans view their infant baptism a bit differently than we Calvinists do ours, it strikes me that this is a fine practice that could be emulated.

For years I didn't know the date I was baptized. Then, among some papers I rarely looked at, I discovered the baptismal certificate given to my parents by our Christian Reformed consistory on November 2 of the year of my birth. I was 7 ½ weeks old. I'm happy I know that. Now, every year it affords me an occasion to especially think about and thank God for his promises in my baptism – and for the faithfulness of my long-deceased parents in having fulfilled the Life-giving vows they made on that long-ago day.

Most of us were baptized as babies. We grew up learning that baptism replaced Old Testament circumcision and is a "sign and seal of God's Covenant of Grace." We were told that our parents, in having us baptized, were responding to God's promises and acknowledging our, and their own, participation in that God-initiated covenant. They agreed to bring us up in the fear of the Lord; and the congregation agreed to help them in that task.

Some of us can probably still recite verbatim parts of the old baptismal liturgy, we heard it so often.

Yet it's becoming easier to lose sight of what baptism means and why it's still crucial. That's especially so because of the influence of evangelical churches who baptize only adult believers and draw no connection between baptism and circumcision and God's covenant.

Christ commanded it

We baptize, first of all, because Christ commanded it. In the Great Commission, moments before his ascension, Jesus told his disciples, "Go and make disciples of all nation, *baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,* teaching them to observe all I have commanded you" (my emphasis, Matt. 28:19).

So baptism conveys God's promise of salvation by faith and all the benefits that flow from that to anyone who believes. (Some baptized persons, as they grow up, tragically don't come to faith and *experience* those benefits, just as many circumcised Israelites became unbelievers. But possible future unbelief does not negate Christ's command, or the sign, or make God's promises empty.

Jesus preceded his Great Commission by asserting that "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." As R.C. Sproul points out in his excellent little booklet "What is Baptism?", "Having risen from the grave, he had the authority, because of his finished work, to create a new sign for the new covenant, and he did just that in commanding baptism." Baptism isn't necessary for salvation but it is absolutely necessary for the Christian: it's necessary for obedience to Christ's command, and a necessary external sign of the New Covenant – a "circumcision of the heart," as Paul calls it.

Jesus' blood and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sins, says the Heidelberg Catechism. The water of baptism is symbolic of that cleansing, and the "drowning" of our sins, and God's promise to regenerate us. Baptism is also a sign of our death and resurrection with Christ. *And* it points to our baptism by the Holy Spirit – by which we mean the Spirit's setting apart all believers, empowering us and equipping us to obey God and grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

We are *sealed* by the Spirit. Paul uses a term that used to be translated as the "earnest" of the Spirit. "Earnest money" is a down payment, and you're guaranteeing that you're good for the rest. God does that for *us* in Christ, "sealing" us for himself and giving us the "earnest" of the Spirit in our hearts (2 Cor. 1:21). Our baptism signifies all that, and it assures us that God never goes back on his word. How amazing! Thanks be to God for his great mercy and indescribable gifts.

To us and our children the promise is made, if we will but trust in his word.
In baptism joining the people of God, we live in the power of his grace.
God gives us life, and we give him thanks:
"To you be our praise evermore! You are our God; we are your people."

David A. Hoekema
(*Psalter Hymnal* #272;
Lift Up Your Hearts #35)

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Artful Eye

Flower Fields, *Frank Sawyer.*

By the time summer comes

By the time you've found the tent pegs
oiled your sandals and your hiking boots
fished out the flotsam from the fly-line
swallowed a gnat or two, tripped over roots
on the trail, with a map full of mistakes –
by then as you squint toward the sky-line
the loons are already whooping warbly hoots
across the cold shimmer of the northern lakes
and you shiver because it's already high-time
to get out your long-johns and your skates
and warm your heart by the hearth with a book –
for by the time you've found the tent pegs
sandals, boots, map and fly-line, the loons took
off and you are left up north with some coffee dregs:
but hey, must we be distressed by lacunae
as simple as loons taking off from the lagoon, eh?

Frank Sawyer has taught in seminaries in Latin America and Hungary for almost three decades. Check out his website at ***srta.tirek.hu/lap/sawyerf****. His book of poems,* A Way of Seeing, *can be ordered by emailing fsawyer777@gmail.com.*

Columns

Gathering Light

Emily Wierenga

How to deal with pain in the church

Dear Pastor,

I am your daughter.

I am the daughter of a pastor and I know what the inside of a church looks like. I know the hardness of the pew and the length of a Sunday morning and the visits. And for many years I fought you. For many years I blamed the church and its pastors for my problems. And then I began to pray.

And when I began to pray I began to cry, and when I began to cry the stress of having to be anything just sort of drained out of me, and then I began to sing.

And sometimes, pastors, I think you believe you can't cry. You can't be any sort of broken because you need to be everything for everybody.

But one of the most radical verses in the Bible is also the shortest: "Jesus wept." He didn't just cry. He wept: he sobbed, he convulsed with sorrow. And he didn't offer excuses for crying. He openly mourned in front of people and he wasn't afraid of appearing less holy or less righteous or less like God when he wept. Because he knew the truth.

He knew that the more we mourn, the more we excavate the lies from our souls, and the greater we make room for joy.

Pastors, when we lose someone, or when we suffer, we don't need a good sermon. We don't need the right verse or an elder to come visit with a plate of muffins his wife baked. That's all nice, but what we really need is for you to come to our door in your sweats and sit on our couch and hold our hand and cry with us.

Pastor, we know you don't wear suits all week.

Wounded together

Because when you lose someone, you lose all of the words and all of the smells and all of the hopes and all of the idiosyncrasies that were connected to them. You sit there with an empty hole where that person used to be and the only thing that reaches you is someone else's pain. Because pain speaks to pain. It fills in the hole. It speaks the language of the wounded. And when you sit with us and cry with us, we know you're hurting too, and it helps to know we're not alone.

And we pray in the pain and then we slowly begin to sing in it too, broken hallelujahs.

We know you don't wear suits all week long. We know that sometimes you swear under your breath and you wish you could skip writing the sermon this week and that you are jealous of your neighbor's boat. We know you are human.

And guess what? It took God becoming human to reach us. It's going to take YOU becoming human to reach your church.

I am your daughter and one day I sat up and took notice of you because your shirt was wrinkly and your face was tired and you yawned at the pulpit. And I saw your wife in the front row, in the wheelchair, slumped over from brain cancer and you couldn't hide it anymore. Your humanness. And your pain spoke to my pain. You understood me. You weren't perfect.

And that's when I began to listen.

Exposed

That's why Jesus dying on the cross means so much to us. Not only did he rise from the dead; he suffered for us first. And that's what speaks loudest. Because he gets it. He knows what it's like not to be able to speak for all of the sorrow. He knows what it's like to be ridiculed and mocked. He didn't pretend to have it altogether. He didn't wear a suit on the cross. He hung there fully exposed to the world. He had nothing to prove.

And you don't either. You are a mouthpiece for the God of all comfort, yes. You are a vessel for the creator who recreates and speaks life to the dead. You are the brother of a Saviour who was crucified and you have been commissioned to do the same. To die, so that others might live.

And sometimes that means getting dirty, getting real, kneeling down in the dust and seeing people for what they are. Hurt. Confused. Spent. Exhausted. World-weary.

And putting a hand on theirs and saying "It's a hell of a life, isn't it?" and being more God to us than any perfect sermon ever could be.

With all of my heart, because I love the church and I believe in your ministry,

Emily.

Emily Wierenga is the author of Chasing Silhouettes *and* Mom in the Mirror: Body Image, Beauty and Life After Pregnancy. *For more info, please visit* ***emilywierenga.com***.

Everyday Christian

Cathy Smith

Synod postscript

I love the CRC. Unequivocally. If you bash the CRC in my presence, sooner or later I'm going to speak up (politely) and point out the good. Like Synod.

The other day I jotted down a great (unattributed) quote from a photographer's website: "It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see." I've attended Synod as an observer a few times. When I look at Synod, I see hundreds of delegates who have rearranged their schedules to attend. Some gave up work, foregoing their wages. Others are parents who juggled complicated family schedules in order to be there. I see women and men, Americans, Canadians and global ecumenical guests, worshipping God together. I see pastors and elders, a holy company, united in their willingness to serve the church.

Seated in the gallery on Monday morning, June 10th, at the Fine Arts Center, I witnessed it all again. Sure, I wish I'd seen more women on the floor, but I counted at least nine. And, bonus, later in the week, Rev. Amanda Benchkhuysen was appointed associate professor of Old Testament studies for Calvin Seminary. Sure, I wish I had seen more diversity, but later that week Synod approved a specific plan to boost the CRC's ethnic leadership as well as a new study committee on ministry to gay members. Sure, the delegates were generally grey-ish, but there was a lively team of individuals serving as Young Adult Representatives. The morning worship illumined my soul – thoughtful liturgy and spirited singing accompanied by drums, piano and flute. Rev. Victor Ko, a church planter from Edmonton, challenged us with a message that embodied joy and hopefulness.

That was the vista from the balcony. But every delegate packs a history. When I get a peek at those backstories, my love for the CRC expands. John Krale, an elder from my local church, served at Synod for the first time in 2011, returning home to commend the devotion and spiritual maturity of his fellow delegates. Ancaster CRC was Synod's host church in 2012, and, for my sister Teresa, first-time deacon there, it was a nervous privilege to serve as a volunteer at Sunday's worship service. I was there, too, fighting back tears, amazed at how God had worked in her life to bring her to this point of leadership and responsibility.

Ken Prol on the floor of Synod, June 10, 2013.

This year I met Ben Vandezande, Director of Canadian Ministries, at the Prince Centre where he has his "own room" because he is in Grand Rapids so frequently. In our conversation I caught the briefest glimpse of his dedicated service to Synod and the CRC.

Saints like you and me

My friend Bill Vis has served as a delegate to Synod eight times. At 60, he's now heading off to Alaska to be the pastor of Trinity Christian Reformed Church in Anchorage. One regret? That he probably won't get to Synod for a few years! Or let me tell you about Ken Prol, pastor of First Randolph CRC in Wisconsin. A few years ago, Ken underwent major back surgery, enduring months of pain. He soldiered on through a lengthy rehabilitation. Thankful for his eventual recovery, Ken committed to doing a leg of the Sea-to-Sea Tour this summer and soon surpassed his fundraising goal. However, disappointingly, he had to endure another surgery in March, this time on his neck. Worse, the fusion broke apart and required further surgery on May 3rd to fuse the cervical spine. You can guess where this is going . . . yes, Ken was at Synod. With barely a voice, he squeaked into a microphone to do his work. And work he did! The reporter for his committee had to leave Synod unexpectedly, so Ken filled in. He's currently back on the bike, in training, determined to fulfill his cycling dream.

Stories like these drop me to my knees to thank God for every person willing to serve at Synod, past, present and future.

The Network reports these facts about this year's Synod:

- People watched the synod webcast over 15,000 times
- There were 98,000 views of synod-related pages on the CRCNA website
- 7,000 people subscribed to the daily Synod News email
- There were visits to the synod website from 71 different countries

These are not just random statistics. Though scoffers may look at the church with "scornful wonder," these numbers are notations in a ledger marked "saints who are keeping watch:" I look at my church, the CRC, with reverential wonder. I see Jesus, the "church's one foundation," bowed like Atlas beneath her, bearing her up. It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see.

Cathy Smith (cathy@christiancourier.ca) is Features Editor with CC. *She lives in Wyoming, Ont.*

Columns

The complexities of commitment explored by Jesse (Hawke) and Celine (Delpy) in Before Midnight.

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

Summer musings on the film series *Before . . .*

In the opening scene of the film *Before Midnight* (2013), Jesse (Ethan Hawke) feels troubled by having to say goodbye to his teenage son at the airport in Greece. His son, Hank, is flying back to his mother in the U.S., and tells his dad he had the greatest summer of his life. Jesse awkwardly embraces Hank and gives last minute instructions as he watches Hank leave with nary a backward glance. He's pensive as he walks out of the airport towards his partner Celine (Julie Delpy), lounging against the car and talking on her cell phone. Ever since the birth of their eight-year old twin daughters, they have made their home in Europe.

We first met Jesse and Celine in *Before Sunrise* (1995) as two hopeful young adults who chance upon each other on a train travelling through Austria. After much conversation, Jesse wants her to get off with him at Vienna. She takes him up on it and they stroll through the quaint streets of the city throughout the night, knowing that at dawn they will go their separate ways. When the film was released, the producers did not think it would get off the ground since the whole thing was basically one long conversation. They were pleasantly surprised when it did very well.

In the second film, *Before Sunset* (2004), the characters are nine years older and Celine pays a surprise visit to Jesse after finding out that he's in Paris on a book tour. They catch up on each other's lives as they meander through Paris, enjoy a cup of coffee and take a short cruise on the Seine. They are now older and freely share life's disappointments and resentments. There is an air of melancholy in the film, which paints an affectionate picture of the couple in a kind of amorphous romance.

Life stages

Jesse and Celine are likable characters. Jesse is engaging with a hint of laid-back aloofness. Celine, on the other hand, is gregarious, smart and quick with her tongue. They are different from one another but could be well suited as a couple. In the first film they are young hopefuls ready to tackle life; in the second they are nine years older and a bit more in tune with the realities of life. By the third, they are in their early forties with children and trying to manage the complexities of their long-term relationship. At the same time, each film stands on its own, and it is possible to enjoy the third film without having seen the first two.

In *Before Midnight*, after Hank leaves, Jesse and Celine wind up their Grecian holiday. As they drive along in a rental car with their daughters sleeping in the back, they begin to subtly rib and tease one another. But Celine, not one to sweep anything under the carpet, warns Jesse they may be in for splitsville. And this is not what we want. Both Jesse and Celine are engaging characters, and we find ourselves rooting for them even as we cringe when we realize how easily their relationship can collapse as they untangle their connection of love, romance and commitment. At the end of the day, however, their intense exchange is possibly the most honest portrayal of a couple trying to find their feet through the complexities of long-term commitment I have seen on film. And while not all of us are as wordy, intense, outspoken and creative in trying to be heard and understood, it is no secret that an equal number of us would clam up under the threat of conflict, letting silence lurk in the form of an elephant in the room while feelings and thoughts are suppressed to such an extent the couple becomes strangers to one another. Conversations, even hard ones, can heal.

As Christians, we too quickly think that conflict in marriage can be cured by our faith. Unfortunately, whatever happens in non-faith homes happens in ours. There is no way our faith protects us from the stages of life that challenge us to grow up. And so what difference does faith make? It can give us stability in the sense that our challenges can be seen as positive nudges towards psycho-spiritual growth. Faith shouldn't be one more thing that alienates us from one another, but an area of common ground from which to draw upon in time of need.

Note: the films contain suggestive language and brief nudity.

Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and member of the Fleetwood CRC in Surrey, BC.

Words from Wild Horses

Kenny Warkentin

Love others – Fulfill the law

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:8-10).

There's a lot packed into the book of Romans but these verses stand out. What grabs my attention are the words: "for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law"; and "whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: Love your neighbor as yourself."

It seems to me that we can distort these words to say, "It's okay, just love one another; my behaviour really doesn't matter, or shouldn't matter to you." If we just say; "Love your neighbour as yourself" and don't go into more detail, have we missed the boat?

"But I'm a safe driver!"

As I read these verses I am aware that what I do affects those around me. My actions are not just specifically mine. When I chose Jesus as Lord of my life, I gave him full deed to my being. Not just a part here or there, but every part. This is like a spiritual renovation where Jesus gradually renovates one area at a time.

If I love God, love myself and love my neighbour, I will realize that to commit adultery, murder, steal or whatever "other" commandment there is means that I am not living in love. When I view my actions as just my own, I am living a life not pleasing to God, nor others or myself. I am not walking in love.

Rights and boundaries

Culturally speaking, I have the right to be whoever I want to be. My choice or decision is mine. No one has the right to speak against this decision. If you do, it's a violation of my human right. Or is it?

The culture around us has set up some rules, some boundary lines for us through various laws. They are good. But why are people breaking them? Could it be that life is just about us, and no one can speak otherwise?

Law is set for our good and the good of others. If we didn't have it humans would be left with their broken vices and that is a scary thought. Yet even in the midst of agreed-upon laws, we push the boundaries to see how much we can get away with. Maybe I won't be caught!

Let's use speeding as an example because this causes a bit of stir whenever I talk about it. We have laws of speed control for reasons of safety. Yet this is usually one of the areas we want to break, or make excuses for breaking: "Everyone else is doing it," "There aren't any police enforcing this area," "I always do it," "I'm a safe driver." Until we get caught. Then we grumble, complain and spout out our anger at the law set for us for our good and the good of others. Realistically, speeding can cause accidents and even death.

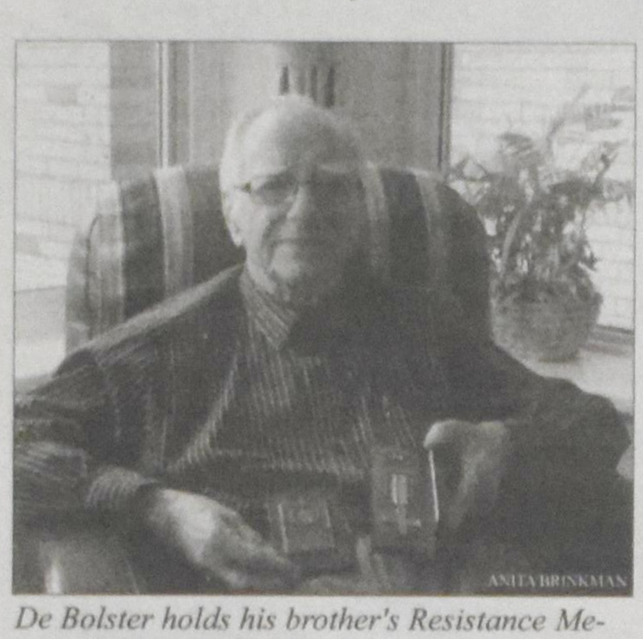
This example reveals our actions as selfish. We weren't acting in love; rather we, in our selfishness, decided that it was all about us. We weren't concerned about others or the ramification of our decisions and choices for others. To really love my neighbour would mean I see past my own "feelings," "my rights," and see that my neighbour has more value than me.

So today, as you live for JUST TODAY, how can you put down your own rights, your own feelings, and think of others? Think of how you could behave in a way that takes the focus off you and on to another person. In doing so you will fulfill the true law – God's law. When you begin to love others, you begin to follow the law. Jesus came not to destroy the law but to fulfill it. As we walk in obedience, denying ourselves and taking up the cross and loving others, we live in accordance to the boundaries set for us.

Kenny is a writer, painter and photographer passionate about gender, sexuality, culture, community and how these pertain to the Body of Christ. Kenny enjoys getting his hands dirty in the garden and tries to get out golfing as much as possible. He lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba, with his wife Paula and their daughter, Phoebe, where he's working on his first book.

News

Life Stories:
Rev. Henry De Bolster



De Bolster holds his brother's Resistance Memorial Cross and plaque.

Anita Brinkman

In the lives of God's people, preserved for us in Scripture, we can see many examples of God's power to guide events and decisions. From Noah, Ruth and Esther to Peter, Stephen and Paul, God brought people to the places they needed to be to accomplish his purposes. He still does today.

Henry De Bolster was born on November 2, 1926. He was a teenager when World War II started. After the Nazis occupied the Netherlands, Henry and his older brother, Jan, joined the Underground. Parts of Henry's work included obtaining and distributing ration cards to people in hiding. In March of 1945, their group was compromised – details of a meeting leaked to the Gestapo. Jan De Bolster was one of the leaders that night. At a scream from the lady of the house where the meeting was held, he and another member ran to a pre-arranged hiding place in a bedroom. The end of a coat belt dangling from the trap door gave away their location, and he was killed instantly. It is hard to see God's sovereignty in a tragedy like this; Jan was a young husband and new father, and his widow never really recovered from the shock of his death. Even in this, however, Henry De Bolster acknowledges God's faithfulness in that most of the 16 men who could have been at the meeting were late, and escaped the raid.

Dividing issues

A conflict about the meaning and purpose of baptism arose in one of the larger Reformed church denominations in the Netherlands during the war years. De Bolster, 18 years old and active in the church's youth organization at the time, was influenced by the split between "synodical" and "liberated" churches. His family joined the "liberated" church, and he took new interest in it; he wanted to understand what was happening and why. He joined the young men's society. He began to consider becoming a minister himself.

An American encouraged De Bolster to consider becoming a minister in North America. It seemed like an adventure to the young De Bolster, and he liked the idea. His fiancée, Cobie, was not as enthused – but slowly warmed to the idea. In 1950, he went to the United States, and started at a seminary linked to the Protestant Reformed Church, in Grand Rapids. Sometime later, his fiancée followed him. De Bolster studied one year at the small PRC seminary, learning a lot, but occasionally coming into conflict with his professors over points of doctrine regarding election, baptism and evangelism. At the end of the year, he and another student were summoned to the home of the main professor and asked to defend their position. After what amounted to a disciplinary trial, they were denied preaching licenses and effectively suspended from seminary; eventually, both were expelled and banned from the Lord's Supper. De Bolster and his friend left the PRC and prayed about moving to Canada. PRC churches in Hamilton and Chatham, Ontario disagreed with the theology and actions of the PRC in Grand Rapids, and so became Canadian Reformed Churches; the Chatham church asked De Bolster to become a leader for them. He was excited by the invitation, and decided to accept it. While frustrating and hurtful, this time in De Bolster's life served to further God's plan for him: growing up in the Netherlands, living and studying in the United States, and moving to Canada gave De Bolster the knowledge of and experience with cultures, church diversity and organizational dangers that he would need later in his years of ministry.

A painful wait

With the end of his seminary studies, however, came the end of his eligibility for a student visa. Henry and Cobie were married December 27, 1951, but had to return to the Netherlands to await their Canadian visas. After half a year, the young couple had cleared their visa trouble and gathered enough money for the voyage back to North America. When they finally arrived in Chatham, Ont. to start their new life, the church clerk, Mr. Ytsma, informed them that the church had called another minister, who had arrived about two months earlier. The church could not employ De Bolster, but honoured its commitment to sponsor him and his bride as immigrants. For five months they stayed with the Ytsmas, looking for work. Cobie cleaned and cooked, helping Mrs. Ytsma care for the other boarders, in exchange for room and board. During their time there, Cobie suffered a miscarriage – a second, since she had experienced one in the Netherlands during their months of waiting. Discouraged and disheartened, De Bolster and his friend from seminary visited Hamilton to look for work there. They stayed in a tiny apartment with kind fellow-immigrants, spending their days applying for work and going for interviews. At one point, De Bolster stood crying, hopeless and disillusioned, on a street corner, praying that somehow they would find work. Just before he ran out of money and returned to Chatham, De Bolster interviewed for a position at Stelco, where he ended up working for four years. Soon, he started thinking again about full-time ministry.

Two calls

Unbelievably, it was his involvement in a third church split that brought De Bolster to seminary. A break in the Canadian Reformed Church, in which the split-away group joined the Christian Reformed Church, saw De Bolster become CRC, which meant he could attend Calvin Seminary. He finished his BA, doing seminary courses concurrently, and graduated from seminary in 1962. He accepted a call to Immanuel CRC in Brampton, and was ordained Minister of the Word and Sacraments.

In his second decade of full-time ministry, while he was serving at Maranatha CRC in St. Catharines, Ont., talk of Christian higher education began. A member of the church approached him and said, "We have grade schools and high schools. It's time for a Christian college."

"I thought it an impossibility at the time, but I agreed to 'consider it,'" said De Bolster. A small committee started with a feasibility study and concluded that they did need a Canadian Christian university in Ontario: "Most of our students won't go to the U.S., so they will go to secular universities. The unfortunate thing is that 80 percent of Christian Reformed students who attend secular universities are lost to the church during their studies." Once they agreed that a Christian university was needed, the committee took to the road, armed with statistics and ideas, organizing meetings throughout Ontario, to inform and mobilize people.

The De Bolsters at their 60th wedding anniversary.

In 1975 they organized the OCCA (Ontario Christian College Association) and started to gather funds. De Bolster became the chair of the board. "We did our utmost to get a Christian college. No university wanted to help. The government told us to forget about it . . . . But amazingly, under the guidance of the Lord, we got a charter in 1980." The government had just passed a law that there were to be no more (secular) degree-granting universities in Ontario – this was interpreted as "no more BA institutions." A few Bible schools got charters following this law. Because of this law, when the OCCA applied for the charter to create Redeemer College, the government actually insisted it had to be Christian – even Reformed Christian! "In the charter, it's right there – it has to be Scripture-based, Reformed theology. That hasn't changed; just the degree-granting privileges have changed," said De Bolster.

Stepping forward

Once the charter was in place, the committee started to look for a president. They pursued five people who each declined. Why? There was no faculty in place, no facility, no students, and no money, really – just a charter. Then the committee met and suggested that De Bolster take the position. "To tell you the truth," he said, "at that time, I laughed. 'I'm not an academic,' I thought. 'I wouldn't be able to do that anyway.' But they said, 'Leave that to us.'" Nominated alongside prominent academic Hank VanAndel, De Bolster thought it was a foregone conclusion that Van Andel would be chosen – but De Bolster was.

In another miracle of God's leadership and provision, the faculty came together, they found a place on Beach Blvd. to serve as a facility, courses were created, and in September of 1982, 97 students – almost twice as many as they had hoped for – sat down for their first classes at Redeemer College.

De Bolster was president of Redeemer College for 13 years, from 1981-1994. Only three years into his ministry there, he collapsed and was sent for treatment. He underwent surgery for colon cancer; the cancer was contained and doctors were able to remove it completely, but the lasting effects of the surgery continued to impact De Bolster's life.

The college thrived under his leadership. Dr. David Johnston, one-time president at both McGill University and

Classifieds

Anniversaries

With praise and thanksgiving to God, the family of

Ben and Julie Winter
(nee Westerhuis)

announce their 45th wedding anniversary on July 20, 2013.

We celebrate God's faithfulness in your lives, and your love and faithfulness to each other and to your family.

With all our love and best wishes,
Mary-Jo & Mike Steenbeek
Jennifer, Kathryn, Julia
Susan Winter Fledderus & Bill Fledderus
Rudy, Nathan
Harold & Robin Winter
Christopher, Rebekah, Suzanna, Isaiah, Abigail
Ron Winter (†1991)

Address: 67 Second St N
Stoney Creek ON L8G 1Z2

Edmonton, AB — Parksville, BC
1963 — July 26 — 2013

Psalm 121:5-8

With thankfulness to God, we celebrate the 50th Wedding Anniversary of

Bill & Nel Schoonderbeek
(nee der Nederlanden)

with love from your children, grandchildren & great-grandchildren

Tim & Jen Schoonderbeek - Edmonton, AB
Sarah James - Edmonton, AB
Angie & Pierre Henry - Toronto, ON
Parker, Grace
Jonathan Schoonderbeek - Edmonton, AB
Ed & Val Schoonderbeek - Dunmore, AB
McKenzie, Hayden
Rose & Pascal Bonnet - Chestermere, AB
Aidan, Amelie

Home address: 1674 Admiral Tryon Blvd
Parksville BC V9P 1Y1

With praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, the family of

Harry & Joanne DeVries
(nee Brouwer)

announce their 50th anniversary on July 12, 2013.

We are thankful for the Lord's grace and faithfulness in your lives. May He continue to bless you.

With all our love and best wishes,
James and Henrietta DeVries
Trevor, Olivia and Sophia
Brian DeVries
Julie and Albert Dreise
Renee, Joshua, Heather and Ryan
Stuart and Beverley DeVries
Seth, Luke and Wesley
Marcia and David Streefkerk
Annika and Julianna

Address: 10356 Greenvalley Rd., RR#5
Dresden ON N0P 1M0

Obituaries

In her 78th year, the Lord suddenly took

Karin Burghart

of Fonthill, Ont., to be with himself in glory.

She was predeceased by both her parents. Survived by her husband of almost 55 years, Lloyd. She is also survived by
Christina Ruth Burghart-Forst of Naples, FL;
Mary Enid Watson of Boston, MA;
Leslie Robert Burghart of Oakville, ON;
John McLain Malek of Norridgewock, ME
Brandon Michael Malek of Durham, NC,
their spouses, nine grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. And her step-mother, Margaret Dunn who just celebrated her 104th birthday in June.

After immigrating to Canada in 1974 she taught primary grades in London, Strathroy, Dunnville and Rimbey, Alta., plus working as a substitute teacher for both Christian and public schools. She was an accomplished seamstress, rug braider, craftsperson and gardener. She worked as Administrator for the Ministry to Seafarers in Montreal for five years until she and Lloyd both retired in 2004.

In accordance with her wishes her body has been cremated.

A memorial service will be held at Holy Trinity Anglican Church, 1557 Pelham Street, in Fonthill, Ont., on August 1st at 1:30 PM.

Service of committal will be held on September 1st, 2013, at Spar Cove, Peaks Island, Maine where the Burgharts have been going for almost 54 years. The Rev. Enid Watson will officiate at that service and then scatter Karin's ashes in the outgoing tide into the Atlantic.

Memorial gifts in her name be sent to:
Ministry to Seafarers Box 128 Place d'Armes Montreal, QC H2Y 3E9

Home address: 13 - 159 Canboro Rd, Fonthill ON L0S 1E5

August 30, 1926 — June 17, 2013
Dedemsvaart, The Netherlands — Thunder Bay, Ontario

"I lift up my eyes to the hills
– where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord,
the maker of heaven and earth."
Psalm 121:1-2

Johan (John) Van Elburg

entered into his Saviour's presence early Monday morning, June 17, 2013

Predeceased by his loving wife of 54 years Maatje Van Elburg (May 1, 2011).

His children and grandchildren & great grandchildren:
Jenny and Henry Mol – Thunder Bay, Ont.
Kevin & Sarah (Benjamin, Marcus)
Robert & Kristen (Kaleb, Mason, Braiden)
Gary & Breena, Brian & Robyn, Derek
Marianne and Archie Nugteren – Glencoe, Ont.
Erica & Eric, Leah, Lynden & Caryn
Joanne and Tim Pasma – London, Ont.
Christopher & Kaitlyn, Robert, Daniel, Lauren
Gerald and Tammy Van Elburg – Thunder Bay, Ont.
Joseph, Devin
Fred and Julie Van Elburg – Thunder Bay, Ont.
Jared, Adam, Jordan, Kara
His brother Gerrit & Tineke Van Elburg in the Netherlands and other extended family.

Correspondence: Jenny Mol (jhmol@tbaytel.net)
926 Candy Mountain Dr, Slate River ON P7J 0C4

Birthdays

OPEN HOUSE for the **80th** birthday of

Tina Miedema

at Parkview Meadows,
72 Town Centre Drive, Townsend, Ont.
on Saturday, July 27, 2013
from 10 am to 12 noon and 2 to 4 pm.
Best wishes only.

Happy 90th Birthday

Harke (Harry) Beimers
August 9, 1923

We thank God for his loving care over the years!

With love from your dear wife Ida and children: Ingrid, Ed, Helen, Mike, Renee and Bert
along with their families including 15 wonderful grandchildren.

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MARANATHA CRC
in Belleville, Ont.
will celebrate its
60th anniversary on
Oct. 5-6, 2013.

A neighbourhood BBQ and open house will be held on Saturday, Oct. 5 as well as a banquet that night and a celebration service Sunday morning.

For details contact the church at 613-962-2062 ext. 200 or email info@maranatha-church.com.

Hillside CRC in Abbotsford BC is seeking a

Pastor

for a 60-70% position in our small church of about 75 people.

Responsibilities involve leading both a pastoral/enabling ministry and some preaching. We are looking for a pastor who would use his or her gifts to further enable our member-participant ministry and work alongside our worship planning teams.

We are looking for a candidate who would live in the Abbotsford area.

To express interest or request information please email kristie.spyksma@gmail.com

Obituary

Dec 29th 1963 – June 30th 2013

Gone to be with her Lord and Savior after a courageous battle with cancer, at the age of 49 our much loved daughter, sister and aunt.

Barbara Leanne Clark
(nee Miedema)

Passed away at the Lakeridge Health Hospital Oshawa, Ont.

Beloved wife of Jamison Clark and dear mother of Jason and Rebecca.

Parents Agnes and Hank Puurveen
Predeceased by her Father
Art Miedema

Sister Margaret De Melo (Gustavo)
Brother Joe Miedema (Jenny)
Sister Theresa Miedema
Step-sister Sandra Huizinga (John)
Step-sister Rosa Schutter (Egbert)
Nieces and Nephews

Correspondence: H. & A. Puurveen
Box 27
Iron-Springs AB TOK 1GO

De Bolster ...continued from p.16

University of Waterloo and now Governor General of Canada, "was the first one to say 'Send me your students once they get their BCS – we don't look at the nomenclature of degrees. We look at programs and we look at students – and they're doing fantastically well.'"

Henry (L) with his son Len (R) and daughter-in-law Elaine at Redeemer's 30th anniversary.

Reunion

In another miracle of timing, De Bolster and his nephew – the only child of De Bolster's only sibling, Jan De Bolster – were reunited after 60 years. De Bolster had gone to a school reunion, and left his address and a request for help finding this nephew with whom he'd lost contact, with a classmate's widow. He got a letter from her informing him that streets in new subdivisions were being named after Underground workers killed during the war, so when *DeBolsterstraat* was named, this nephew had been at the naming. A few months later, De Bolster got a phone call – "Hello, Uncle Henk." The nephew came with his wife to Canada, and, because he had no children, gave his father's medal of honour to Henry De Bolster. They're in fairly regular contact now.

In all of this, the ups and downs, difficulties and rejoicing, De Bolster would say that God has been faithful. The hardships revealed God's nearness, while the joys brought encouragement and reassurance of God's promises. "I am thankful to God for my life," said De Bolster reflectively. "I thank him for using even me."

Anita Brinkman is a part-time tutor and freelance writer from Chatham, Ontario. With this series, she hopes to demonstrate that every life has stories worth preserving and sharing.

Advertising

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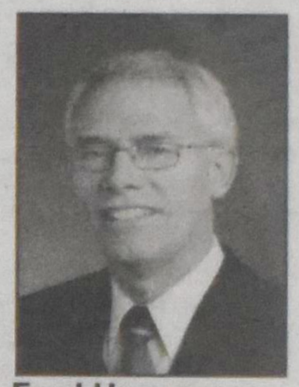

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Classifieds

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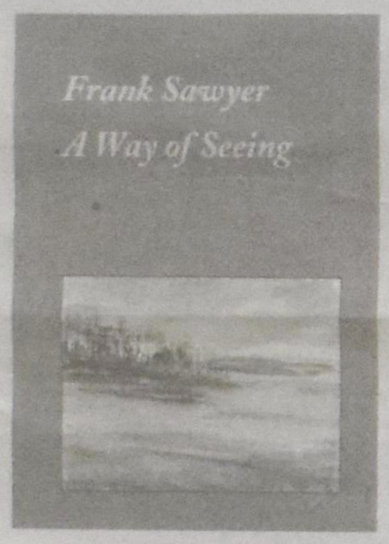
Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

July 28 Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Ralph Koops will be preaching. DVDs are available.

Oct 5-6 Maranatha CRC in **Belleville**, Ont. will celebrate its 60th anniversary with a BBQ and open house, banquet. Celebration service Sunday morning. For details, see ad p.17 or contact the church at 613-962-2062 ext. 200 or email info@maranatha-church.com.

Oct 31-Nov 2 Andreas Center Conference. Dordt College. More info at: www.dordt.edu/events/conference2013/



This book may be ordered from Frank Sawyer for 12 dollars plus postage. Kindly order or inquire by emai:
fsawyer777@gmail.com

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Our first rehearsal/social will be held August 19 2013, 7:00 PM at Redeemer University College, 777 Garner Rd, Ancaster ON.

For registration info please follow the link to:
www.martinmans.nl/libertas.
Tel. 905 522 0001
or register@libertasvoices.com.

Job Opportunity

Babine Truck & Equipment Ltd
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See all recently run job ads on our website at:
christiancourier.ca
and click on the jobs link on the bottom banner.

Summer puzzle challenge

There are 30 books of the Bible in this paragraph. Can you find them? This is a most remarkable puzzle. It was found by a gentleman in an airplane seat pocket, on a flight from Los Angeles to Honolulu, keeping him occupied for hours. He enjoyed it so much, he passed it on to some friends. One friend from Illinois worked on this while fishing from his john boat. Another friend studied it while playing his banjo. Elaine Taylor, a columnist friend, was so intrigued by it she mentioned it in her weekly newspaper column. Another friend judges the job of solving this puzzle so involving, she brews a cup of tea to help her nerves. There will be some names that are really easy to spot. That's a fact. Some people, however, will soon find themselves in a jam, especially since the book names are not necessarily capitalized. Truthfully, from answers we get, we are forced to admit it usually takes a minister or a scholar to see some of them at the worst. Research has shown that something in our genes is responsible for the difficulty we have in seeing the books in this paragraph. During a recent fund raising event, which featured this puzzle, the Alpha Delta Phi lemonade booth set a new record. The local paper, The Chronicle, surveyed over 200 patrons who reported that this puzzle was one of the most difficult they had ever seen. As Daniel Humana humbly puts it, "The books are all right here in plain view hidden from sight." Those able to find all of them will hear great lamentations from those who have to be shown. One revelation that may help is that books like Timothy and Samuel may occur without their numbers. Also, keep in mind, that punctuation and spaces in the middle are normal. A chipper attitude will help you compete really well against those who claim to know the answers. Remember, there is no need for a mad exodus; there really are 30 books of the Bible lurking somewhere in this paragraph waiting to be found. God Bless.

Note: Osee appears in the King James Version translation of Romans 9:25 as a variant spelling of Hosea.

Give up? Want to know the answers? Email admin@christiancourier.ca
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News

Together

This story was awarded an Honourable Mention in the Intermediate Category of Christian Courier*'s* ***Fourth Annual Children's Short Story Contest****. We were impressed with its integration of current events into fiction, and by its believable dialogue and strong narrative voice. More winning stories can be found on pages 10 and 11 inside.*

Amy Ramzy

I was reaching the last leg of the race. I was at the 4 hour mark now, and the finish line was approaching. My heart was pumping so hard it felt like it was going to burst out of my chest. Even though I was near the middle of the pack, just *finishing* the Boston Marathon would be an accomplishment. Mom was there in the stands, waving her sweater around like a crazy person, cheering me on. The whole crowd was on their feet, yelling and encouraging the runners to make a good finish.

Suddenly, I heard a loud BOOM go off in front of me. It was louder than a gunshot or a car crash. A celebration cannon that had gone off? I kept running, trying to rack my brain for an explanation. All the other competitors had the same bewildered look that I did. I saw a fiery ball of orange go up, and I could see thick smoke rising in the near distance, and the air turned hot. Maybe a broken gas line? Then there was another one, behind me this time, and I knew something had gone terribly wrong. I stopped running. Those were bombs that had gone off! The cheering of the people turned into frantic screaming. Some were crying. Sirens wailed as emergency crews came. Police ran onto the tracks, urging everyone away from the explosion. Everyone was running.

I panicked. "Where's my mom? Has anyone seen my mother?"

Was she hurt? Was she ok? Where did she go? Now that I look back on it, I should have rushed in to help clear the barricades, or help the wounded, or something heroic like that, but instead, I took off. It was where the police were urging you to go, and that's where the flow of people was headed, and it was so easy to just escape it all. I tried to stay calm.

I was desperately praying as I joined the mass of people . . . praying as I searched every person I passed, hoping to find Mom. I was praying as I called out to people if they had seen Cindy Johnson. None of them had. I was praying as I retrieved my bag and water. I was still praying when an officer told me to check the family waiting area where separated family members and friends could find each other.

Searching

As I walked there, I tried my cell phone. All the lines were busy. They were jammed from all the people trying to find their loved ones. I tried texting her. No reply. "Please, please, God, let her be alright," I prayed.

When I reached the family waiting area, I couldn't see her there. There were other runners waiting for their family members and families waiting for their athletes.

"Have you seen Cindy Johnson?" I asked. All I got was shaking heads.

"Maybe – God forbid – she was taken to a hospital. You could try to search for her there," a young woman suggested.

"I'll try. Thank you for your help," I replied.

So I left the waiting area and went to Massachusetts General Hospital where some of the patients were being treated. It took me half an hour to walk there since I couldn't run through the crowds. My anxiety level was getting higher with each passing minute. The whole way there, I kept asking everyone I met if they had seen Mom.

Finally, I reached the hospital. The reception area was crowded, but eerily calm. Nobody talked. They were all taking in what had just happened.

I went up to the receptionist and asked if my mom was there. "Her name is Cindy Johnson. She's about 5 foot 5, and has short blonde hair. I saw her just before the time of the explosions. Then I couldn't find her. Is she here?"

"It happened so fast we couldn't check everyone for ID, honey. You can wait here until those patients are finished surgeries to look for your mom."

"If you hear any news of her please tell me right away," I pleaded.

"Of course, sweetheart."

I waited for almost an hour on a stiff plastic chair. People came and went. Sirens were still blaring in the distance. Then the receptionist called me! "A nurse informed me that a woman fitting your description just finished surgery and is in the recovery room. You can go visit her."

"Thank you so much!" I said, and I walked as fast as I could to the room without getting in trouble.

I opened the door slowly. There was a lady, still asleep on a bed, and a nurse monitoring her. I walked towards them apprehensively, worried that my prayers might come crashing down on me. I looked. It was a paler, sicker version of my mom.

I burst into tears. Thank you, God! She's alive! I was overwhelmed with thankfulness and all the stress of the night caught up with me in one big breakdown.

"She had her left leg amputated and she had shrapnel in her arm, but she'll live," the nurse said. I was too dazed to give an answer other than a nod. The nurse left to deal with other patients and I sat down in a chair by her bed. Exhausted, I fell asleep.

A few moments after I woke up, Mom did too.

"Peter," she said hoarsely. "Is that you?"

"Yes, Mom. It's me. I'm so glad you're okay!" I could have cried again right there, hearing her voice again, but I held on.

"Things are going to be different now . . . for us . . . because of this . . ." she said.

"Shh . . . don't strain yourself. Don't worry, Mom. As long as we've got Jesus on our side, we'll be OK. I can work extra hard to pay for your hospital bills. We can get some help from the people at church until you recover. No matter what happens, Mom, we'll get through this together."

"Yes," she replied. "Together."

Amy Ramzy is 13 years old. She lives in Oakville and just graduated from Grade 8 at John Knox Christian School. She loves reading novels, listening to music and playing flute and piano.

New position:

Social Media Intern

Christian Courier is now accepting applications for a new, six-month internship as our Social Media Manager. This position would take approximately five hours a week, and will build valuable experience for your resume.

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CHRISTIAN COURIER

Odds and Trends

Deadly gifts

Nothing says summer like homemade preserves – raspberry jam, spaghetti sauce, hot pepper jelly. "The jars of golden peaches lined up on the counter looked like currency from another time," as Barbara Kingsolver describes in *Prodigal Summer.* But done carelessly, home canning is dangerous; it can lead to botulism. I'll never forget the scene in Carol Shield's novel *Larry's Party*, where Dot accidentally kills her mother-in-law by serving her canned runner beans that had gone bad.

And I just came across another cautionary tale about the need to sterilize preserves properly – and this time it's not fiction. On July 6, a jar of exploding rhubarb chutney took a fridge door off its hinges, temporarily lifted up the kitchen ceiling and cracked several walls in a small British flat. Margaret Goodwin, 66, was startled awake by the seven a.m. blast that she says might have killed her if she had been closer to it. The noise was so loud she thought a gas main had exploded.

But no – the culprit was an innocent jar of homemade chutney, a gift from a friend. It had fermented in the fridge for five days, giving off methane gas which, the *Daily Mail* reported, can be explosive when mixed with air. Police warned other recipients of the rhubarb chutney to dispose of it.

Mosquito Fritos

For a culinary diversion in another direction, try bugs. "Stinkbugs have an apple flavour, and red agave worms are spicy. A bite of tree worm apparently brings pork rinds to mind," begins a recent *National Geographic* article. It cites a new report put out by the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, which encourages sampling the 1,900 edible insect species available on earth. Roughly two billion people around the world eat insects regularly – only in Western countries does squeamishness generally deter us.

But what if we could get beyond that? The U.N. argues that we're ignoring a food source packed with protein, fiber, good fats and vital minerals. Raising and harvesting insects uses up less land than raising cows, pigs or sheep – and insects emit fewer greenhouse gases than livestock. Eating the insects that bug us is also a safer way of eliminating them than using pesticides, *National Geographic* points out.

According to an insect cookbook, *Creepy Crawly Cuisine*, the most popular and plate-friendly species are beetles, butterflies and moths, bees, ants, grasshoppers and locusts, flies, mosquitoes and stinkbugs.

– Angela Reitsma Bick